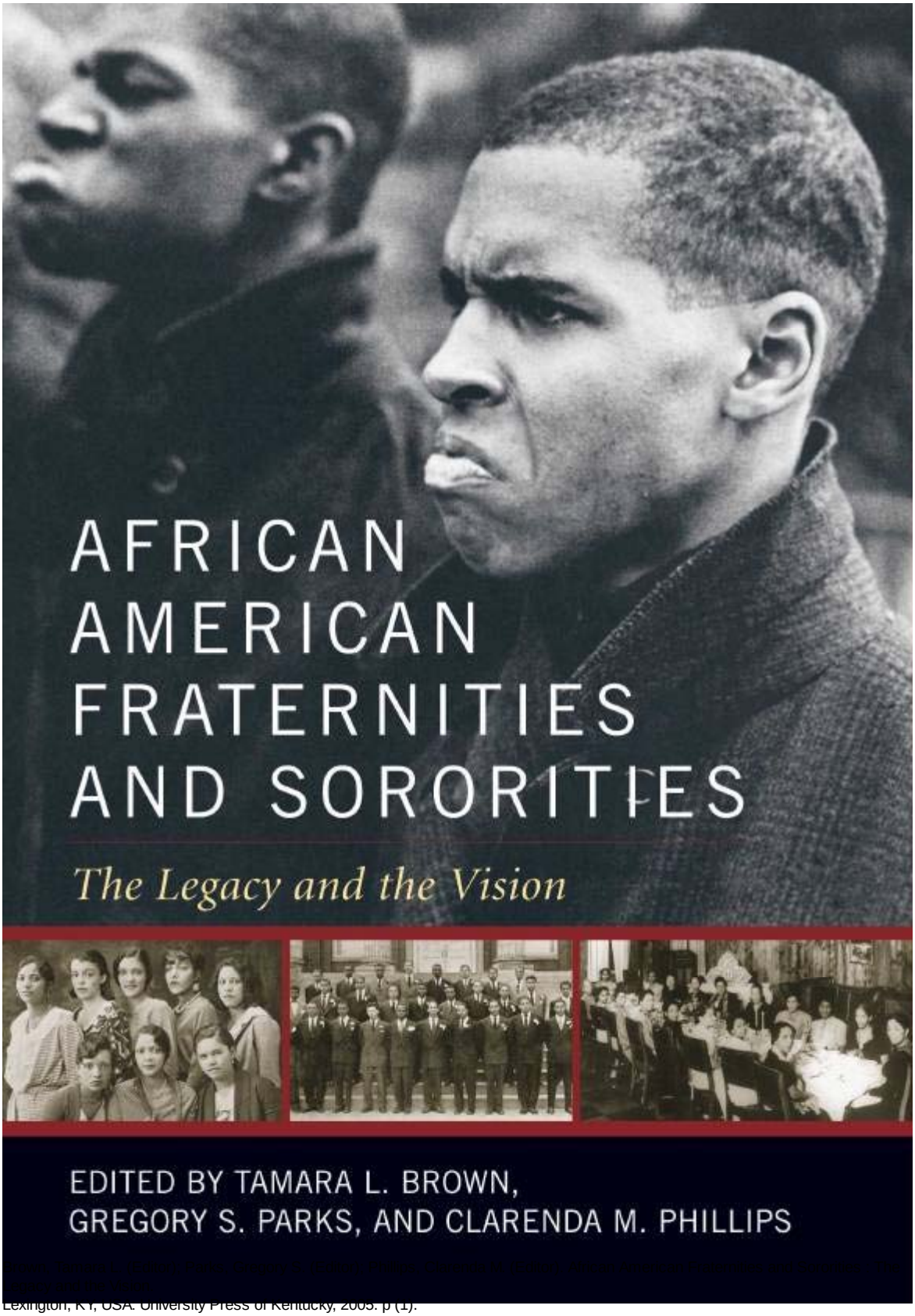


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# African American Fraternities and Sororities

## The Legacy and the Vision

*Edited by*
Tamara L. Brown
Gregory S. Parks
Clarenda M. Phillips

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# INTRODUCTION

*Tamara L. Brown*

The year 2006 will mark the centennial anniversary of the intercollegiate black Greek-letter organization (BGLO) movement in the United States. Born at the dawn of the twentieth century, these organizations not only served to solidify bonds among African American college students but also had (and continue to have) a vision and a sense of purpose: leadership training, racial uplift, and high scholasticism. It is no accident that many of the best and brightest African American leaders came from the ranks of these organizations. Dr. Charles Drew (who discovered a way to separate red and white blood cells) and Dr. Mae Jamison (an engineer and astronaut) have charted new courses in the area of science. Men and women like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Fannie Lou Hamer have left an indelible mark on civil rights and women's rights. Visionaries such as Dr. Johnetta B. Cole (former president of Spelman College) and Hugh Price (director of the United Negro College Fund) have been towering figures in the area of education. Political leaders such as Carol Moseley Braun (the first female African American U.S. senator) and Thurgood Marshall (the first African American Supreme Court justice) have made tremendous contributions in politics and government. These are just a few names and a few fields in which BGLO members have made their mark. Surprisingly, after almost 100 years, the general public still knows very little about BGLOs beyond their high-energy step shows and periodic hazing incidents. What is more distressing is the paucity of scholarly research that has been conducted on these groups. This book seeks to remedy these issues.

The production of this book has been an arduous journey. It started in 1999, when I began my first year as assistant professor at the University of Kentucky. There I met Gregory Parks, who was a first-year graduate student in clinical psychology. Although I was not Gregory's primary adviser, I was one of only two African American faculty members in the Psychology Department and the only faculty person of color in the clinical psychology program, and Gregory often dropped by my office to discuss any number of issues. Many of these issues pertained to psychology or race, but our conversations often turned to our membership in and dedication to our respective fraternal organizations. I am a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and Gregory is a



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member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Our conversations about these organizations often focused on two topics, one ultimately leading to the other. The first was the issue of pledging and hazing, and the second was that nothing of a scholarly nature had been written about BGLOs.

In terms of hazing and pledging, our respective BGLO experiences led us to believe that a great deal of good could come out of the pledge process. However, we also understood the stark reality of hazing and that it could result in injury, death, and lawsuits that could jeopardize the very existence of BGLOs. We found ourselves expressing great frustration that these competing realizations—the existence of pros and cons to the pledge process—were seldom discussed within the BGLO community.

Due to the time constraints of graduate school, which were quickly followed by the publish-or-perish demands of my early career, I had not been an active member of Delta for several years. Therefore, I was surprised to learn from Gregory that the debate about pledging and hazing was a one-sided—almost propagandist—one. What became clear to me was that those who opposed the practice of pledging argued that pledging and hazing were inextricably intertwined and would spell the ruin of BGLOs. Although this is an understandable position, the problem is that the opponents of pledging had managed to squelch the dissenting voices within BGLOs. It had become a topic with two sides, but only one voice. The power brokers in these organizations had seen to that. Gregory had been fully active in Alpha Phi Alpha since being initiated and was well aware of this silent debate. He and I both knew the complexities of this issue and that the pledge process presented great challenges for BGLOs, but we also knew that it had created wonderful experiences for many members. More important, we knew that this topic was not an either-or issue—either a two-weekend membership intake process, or pledges who wound up hospitalized or dead. There was a huge gray area that no one was willing or able to discuss.

We initially made plans to write about this debate to provide a forum where the voices on both sides could be heard. It seemed to us that little would be accomplished—but a lot of harm might result—without a healthy dialogue. We were aware that most public forums, particularly BGLO publications, would likely ban such a piece. We also realized that it might receive little public attention if published by a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal. We decided to write a book about pledging and hazing, but there were two other concerns. The first was that pledging and hazing were not the only issues confronting BGLOs; many other issues also needed to be addressed. The other concern was that no

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book of a scholarly nature had been written about BGLOs. Therefore, we decided to pursue the larger goal of writing a scholarly book that covered a broad range of important issues related to BGLOs.

The 2000–2001 academic year came and went, and we had not done much work on the book. Gregory had started to do some reading on his own, but we seldom talked about the project together. During the fall of 2001, while discussing BGLOs in general, Gregory mentioned the book project, indicating that the best approach might be to coedit a book. In thinking about possible topics to be addressed and the abundance of research materials that could be used to flesh out these topics, it was apparent that the research and writing process would be much longer than either of us had anticipated. We did not want this book to be an in-depth coverage of only a handful of topics, nor did we want to superficially address a wide range of issues. We wanted, and expected, our book to be the definitive work on BGLOs. As such, we needed to address many unanswered questions about BGLOs in a substantive fashion, and an edited book seemed like the best way to accomplish these goals.

Gregory began doing more reading on BGLOs, determining what the central issues were, what the research had to say about them, and who was conducting the research. During this time, he also began to piece together the early parts of the proposal that we would ultimately submit to publishers. In the spring of 2001, he presented me with what he had found, and from that point, we began to lay out the chapters and what we wanted each of them to address. We also began a nationwide search for authors who were experts on the various aspects of BGLO history, life, and culture we wanted to cover.

One additional difficulty we faced was figuring out how to edit the chapters in a timely fashion and not allow ourselves to be biased by our BGLO memberships. This led us to request the assistance of Dr. Clarenda Phillips, a sociologist with expertise in the areas of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Her academic background, and the fact that she is not a BGLO member, made her an excellent candidate to coedit the book with us. We knew that she would be unbiased and would be able to raise critical yet scholarly questions about the topics from an outsider's perspective.

The fruit of our collective labor is this book, which synthesizes all that is currently known about BGLOs from a scholarly perspective. Our goal was to make this a comprehensive book, one that explores both the breadth and the depth of available knowledge about BGLOs. As such, we do not simply relate the history of these groups, touch upon their culture, or highlight the issues they confront. Nor do we shy away from controversial topics. In this book, we

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discuss numerous issues in depth from many different perspectives (e.g., criminological, educational, historical, legal, psychological, sociological), as well as present new ideas and provoke new debates. Beyond providing answers, we pose critical questions about BGLOs, highlighting areas where additional research is needed about these groups.

This book is divided into three parts. The first part provides a historical context for understanding BGLOs. The chapters in this section highlight the confluence of social and cultural factors that influenced African American college students at the turn of the twentieth century, compelling them to form collegiate fraternities and sororities.

Chapter 1 ties African history, culture, and customs to modern-day BGLOs. Gloria Dickinson examines the many ways that African heritage was embedded in the establishment and growth of the original eight collegiate BGLOs. Specifically, she explores two aspects of African connectivity to sorority and fraternity life: African cultural continuities—both conscious and unconscious—and the deliberate emulation of African culture. The fact that both patterns can be traced from the inception of BGLOs to the present time is significant. It underscores the argument that although the term *Afrocentric* was not in vogue in 1906 (when the first collegiate BGLO was founded), black college students of that era were well aware of their connection to Africa, and that their conception of Africa was quite different from the demonized version of the continent found in European and American history texts.

Chapter 2 investigates the origin of college fraternities and sororities in general. Craig Torbenson discusses early U.S. colleges and universities and student life. He highlights early student organizations, how the first college fraternities and sororities began and slowly evolved, the geographic patterns of their origin, and their proliferation throughout the United States. He also examines how and why different types of fraternities and sororities—particularly those that were nonwhite and non-Protestant—evolved and how the formation of white fraternities and sororities contributed to the development of BGLOs.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide the histories of nineteenth-century fraternal and benevolent societies and of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity—the first BGLO. In the late eighteenth century, African American fraternal and benevolent societies began to take shape as a means for blacks to support one another in a racially hostile society, create better men and women, and effect social change. These groups were some of the first attempts at organization for free blacks in the United States. In chapter 3, Anne Butler provides a history of these fraternal

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and benevolent societies, the social forces that created them, their activities, and the people that shaped them. She also illustrates how these groups served as precursors to BGLOs, and how they influenced the founding of BGLOs in the twentieth century. Chapter 4 examines the 100-year history of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, also known as the Boulé. William Harris, noted historian and grand historian for Sigma Pi Phi, describes how a group of black physicians in Philadelphia—men who were financially secure, leaders in their communities, and "refined," yet isolated from both white society and the masses of blacks—organized in 1904 and created Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, the first BGLO (predating its collegiate counterparts). Ultimately, it would expand throughout the United States and have a membership roster that included some of the most influential black men in twentieth-century America.

In chapter 5, Michael Washington and Cheryl Nuñez illustrate the different social forces that gave rise to BGLOs on black and white college campuses. They discuss the history of black higher education and the creation of BGLOs to counter the isolation and exclusion of black students on white campuses and their paternalistic control on black campuses. They also contextualize the development of BGLOs as secret organizations that struggled to reconcile competing ideologies of African American social progress.

In chapter 6, André McKenzie outlines the founding and early history of each of the nine major BGLOs. He then provides a history of the National Pan-Hellenic Council, the umbrella organization for these groups, which was organized in 1930 to address problems of mutual interest to its member organizations.

In chapter 7, Robert Harris describes the history of the American Council on Human Rights, formed in 1948 by six BGLOs in an effort to mobilize the influence and resources of its members in the struggle for civil rights for all U.S. citizens.

The second part of the book covers BGLO culture, describing the internal dynamics of these organizations and the various ways that BGLO members demonstrate commitment to their organizations. In chapter 8, Mindy Stombler and Irene Padavic compare black and white fraternities' little sister programs, based on forty in-depth interviews with college women. Researchers and the press paint a bleak picture of male dominance and female subordination in these groups, but black and white women do not experience domination identically, and the authors explore how they deal differentially with their fraternity brothers' treatment.

Some of the most well-known aspects of BGLO culture are its public rituals: branding, calls, and stepping. In chapter 9, Sandra Posey provides an in-

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depth exploration of branding. Although branding has been banned by some colleges and universities, it is still widely practiced among BGLO members, and Posey's analysis helps explain why. All BGLOs have a distinctive vocal greeting (i.e., a call) that is exchanged among members, primarily in social settings and during competitive events. In chapter 10, Marcella McCoy discusses the various types of calls, yells, and chants used by BGLOs and their significance. She also discusses the divisive nature of the call, with young and old members disagreeing about the appropriateness and usefulness of such expressions. In chapter 11, Carol Branch focuses on the history and significance of stepping, a set of choreographed dance moves, claps, and stomps performed in synchronization by BGLO members.

In chapter 12, Clarenda Phillips examines how African American sororities are an extension of the women-centered networks found in the African American community, where women are valued and significant contributors, regardless of the presence of men. Such women-centered networks are both a continuation of African cultural traditions and a functional adaptation to the experience of racism, sexism, and classism in the United States. Phillips notes that African American women who join African American sororities become part of a kinship system that is designed to last a lifetime and that acts to shape their identities and socialize them into meaningful leadership roles.

The third part of the book addresses those issues with which BGLOs continue to grapple as they seek to move forward in the twenty-first century. In chapter 13, Tyra Black, Joanne Belknap, and Jennifer Ginsburg discuss alcohol and drug use, racism, sexism, aggression, and rape within the context of the college fraternity culture. These authors summarize the existing research on these issues with regard to white fraternities and report their findings in the only study to date that included the black Greek system.

Fraternities and sororities have often been criticized for compromising the academic pursuits of their members. However, research suggests that BGLO membership may actually improve college retention and academic performance and cultivate leadership skills. Shaun Harper, Lauretta Byars, and Thomas Jelke describe this phenomenon in chapter 14. Specifically, they provide an overview of research regarding African American students' adjustment to college and their experiences at different types of institutions. This is followed by a synthesis of the literature on outcomes for BGLO members in four domains: academic achievement and cognitive development, leadership development, racial and womanist identity development, and practical competence.

In chapter 15, Deborah Whaley analyzes Spike Lee's 1988 film *School Daze,*

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which is the only major motion picture in which BGLOs are the central subject. Although Lee does not claim that his characters depict actual African American sororities, his production notes suggest that they represent two existing sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta. Whaley analyzes Lee's portrayal of these sororities and their symbolic representation of the problems faced by African American college communities in general. She discusses the important and representative moments of cultural, sexual, and gender politics in the film and ends with a discussion of skin color and hair prejudice in African American sororities to address the contradictory politics of black femininity that the film attempts to illuminate.

In chapter 16, Gregory Parks and Tamara Brown address what is arguably the most contentious issue within BGLOs: pledging and hazing. Despite the NPHC's 1990 ban on pledging, underground pledging has persisted among BGLOs. Proponents of pledging argue that there is no other way to foster bonds among members, and opponents see no way of disentangling pledging and hazing. Parks and Brown discuss the history of pledging, particularly within the context of BGLOs; highlight the current social-psychological and legal research on pledging and hazing; and provide a voice to both sides of the pledging argument. They conclude by discussing how BGLOs can formulate a pledge process that does not put people's lives at risk but still fosters the development of brotherhood and sisterhood.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the BGLO movement was not only given form, it was also given purpose—one that has been lived out for a century now. This book looks at the indelible mark BGLOs have left on the U.S. landscape and the myriad issues with which they wrestle as they seek to craft a vision for the twenty-first century. We set out to inspire the uninitiated, recommit the initiated, and compel the researcher to take seriously the vital role BGLOs play in the African American community. We hope that, with the help of our authors, we have done just that.

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# Part I

## Historical Context



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# 1

# Pledged to Remember

## Africa in the Life and Lore of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

*Gloria Harper Dickinson*

This chapter elucidates the myriad ways "Africa" has been preserved and perpetuated in the rituals, public accounts, and service projects of black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs). Specifically, it explores three aspects of African connectivity to black sorority and fraternity life: conscious and unconscious African cultural continuities, deliberate emulations of African culture, and the presence of these organizations on the African continent. The fact that these patterns can be traced from the inception of black sororities and fraternities to the present underscores the contention that although the term *Afrocentric* was not in vogue in 1906 when the first BGLO was founded, the college students of that era were very much aware of their connection to an Africa that was quite different from the mythologized (and often demonized) continent depicted by turn-of-the-century European and U.S. historical texts, media, and popular culture.

In sum, BGLO choices regarding nomenclature, iconography, organizational structure, core values, pledge practices, performance, chapter locales, and programs of service have direct links to African religious practices, secret societies and title associations, aesthetics, philosophy, values, and educational norms.

## For the Good of the Race

The founders of the first eight BGLOs were scholar-activists slightly more than one generation removed from slavery. They hailed from all parts of the United States and were pursuing undergraduate curricula at Cornell University, Howard University, Indiana University, and Butler University. The earliest of



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them entered college during the decade following the historic *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) Supreme Court decision that affirmed both the doctrine of "separate but equal" and the permanence of Jim Crow. So, like their elders, they became enmeshed in organizing "for the race." These students learned early in life to cope with what Sonya Anderson deems "daily racialized aggressions" by selecting an affirming survival strategy,[1] while grappling to find ways of "being black in white spaces."[2] Notably, it is their successes (and failures) that dot the landscape of African and African American sacred and secular life being explored here.

Two key factors probably influenced the establishment of BGLOs. The first was the tradition of organizing "for the good of the race," as modeled by their parents' generation and those before them. Early-twentieth-century black college students were fully aware that Prince Hall and Richard Allen had responded to rejection by establishing their own parallel Masonic lodge and church more than a century earlier. Moreover, by 1906, the ten-year-old National Association of Colored Women's Clubs was in the vanguard of supporting Ida Wells Barnett's antilynching campaign, and the Niagara Movement meeting of 1905 had also been well publicized. So the students knew that they had a legacy of "racial uplift" to continue. Indeed, the 1905 Niagara Falls meeting that marked the beginning of the Niagara Movement predated the creation of Alpha Phi Alpha (in New York State) by only one year. By all accounts, the Cornell students who founded Alpha Phi Alpha were fully aware of the Niagara Falls events organized by Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, who would later become a member of their fledgling organization. Young and old alike understood the threats facing the black community, and despite their differing strategies (as evidenced by the struggle between supporters of Booker T. Washington and those of DuBois), there seemed to be an implicit agreement about the power and importance of *group* efforts. Consequently, when those young black men at Cornell University were excluded from white fraternal organizations, they emulated a centuries-old African American strategy by creating parallel structures of their own. And, with a vision and foresight that, in retrospect, seems incredible, within a year they began to establish new chapters. Their sophistication and worldview were such that although they focused on organizing at historically black colleges and universities, they simultaneously organized at the University of Toronto as well.

The second readily identifiable practice that influenced the establishment of BGLOs was a naming pattern that overtly affirmed the connection between black North American institutions, organizations, and people and their Afri-

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can ancestry. Like Hall and Allen in the eighteenth century, nineteenth-century citizens had continued to use the words *Africa, Abyssinia, Canaan, Cush, Ethiopia,* and other synonyms for Africa when naming institutions, denominations, sanctuaries, schools, and other edifices. So even though these students were living in an era when the vagaries of racism and Jim Crowism had led to changes in racial designations (e.g., the National Association for the Advancement of *Colored* People), it is reasonable to conclude that many of the early-twentieth-century student-founders were the progeny of communities where institutions were named in honor of people and things "African." Moreover, they had likely been mentored by adults who valued political, social, and economic equity for "the race" and had probably observed many adult organizational models that promoted mutual aid, self-help, and support for the less fortunate. In fact, all the BGLOs defined a mission that included *service,* in sharp contrast to the social foci of the white fraternities and sororities. So strong was this commitment that, following Alpha Kappa Alpha's 1913 lead, other BGLOs also incorporated in order to establish chapters not only on other campuses but also in other cities. This allowed members to continue their affiliation beyond their undergraduate days, "for the good of the race."

Using the lens of racial pride of the post–World War I era, it is not surprising to find that, in the chapter called "Inspiring Race Pride," the authors of the *Omega Psi Phi History* ascribe the 1920 inception of the annual National Achievement Week observance to a desire to support the work of their brother Dr. Carter Godwin Woodson, who in 1915 and 1916 had founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and the *Journal of Negro History,* respectively.[3] Omega men were so inspired by Woodson's address to their ninth annual convention in Nashville that they voted to dedicate a week to the study of "Negro literature and culture" that would include members of their communities who did not belong to the fraternity.[4] This is but one of many examples of the interplay between BGLOs' commitment to both service and racial uplift.

## Unconscious Connections

Recent research shows that Masonic and other fraternal orders, African secret societies and title associations, Kemetic (Egyptian) and West African cosmology and pedagogy, and an African aesthetic have all contributed to the ritualistic behavior and core values of BGLOs. However, the African connections revealed by this research would be categorized as unconscious.

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### MASONRY

Much of the unconscious African connection to BGLOs has its roots in African-influenced Masonic rituals and practices. "Unconscious" must be placed in context, however. Although contemporary members of BGLOs may not be well versed in Masonic rites, this was not true of the Cornell University Alpha Phi Alpha founders, who held their first rituals in an Ithaca Masonic lodge and are said to have "borrowed" Masonic regalia from the lockers in the building. We do not know how many of the founders were Masons, but we do know that the original Alpha Phi Alpha handshake was so similar to the Prince Hall Masons' greeting that it had to be changed.[5]

### AFRICAN BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES AND TITLE ASSOCIATIONS

Current studies of the secret societies and title associations in the parts of West Africa where most black North Americans originated reveal that many U.S. religious and secular groups were, albeit unknowingly, perpetuating African organizational models and values. Consequently, the new student organizations, in modeling themselves after the fraternal (Freemasonry) and civic organizations of their hometowns, were unknowingly perpetuating African core values (as preserved by black churches and benevolent societies and clubs) as they defined their respective organizational missions.

The most obvious mutual value that reveals an African correlation is the "community service" component of black sororities and fraternities. Rather than mimicking the purely social purposes of the white fraternal organizations from which they were excluded, the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha—inspired by the need for social action—intentionally chose not to follow along the lines of Cornell's traditional fraternities.[6] In making this choice, the Alphas, like the student-founders of BGLOs that would follow, unknowingly modeled their core values after the benevolent societies, fraternal orders, churches, and civic associations common to black communities of that era. Not surprisingly, Betty M. Kuyk's exploration of the links between Richmond's Ancient Order of St. Luke and the title associations and secret societies of what is now Nigeria reveals African antecedents to Virginia's benevolent societies and Masonic orders. She notes that many enslaved Virginians of Igbo and Efik heritage originated from the Bight of Benin area, where both secret societies and title associations existed. She argues that title association structures and values reappear most frequently in America's benevolent societies. For example,

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both the Agbalaze Igbo title association and the Order of St. Luke required candidates to pay fees, endure ritual ordeals, and then pay additional fees to continue the initiation process. Besides these analogous processes, Kuyk found that the West African and Virginian organizations also had parallels in their symbols, use of colors, and "functional structures." So, when comparing nineteenth-century black fraternal organizations with their white counterparts, Kuyk argues that although both supported life insurance, elder care, and charitable donations, the black fraternal orders were distinguished by their inclusion of a "black economic enterprise" component dedicated to raising the black community's living standards.[7]

Since the founders of the original eight BGLOs in the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) were the progeny of communities replete with fraternal organizations like those in Richmond, it is understandable that they would model their campus organizations after the African-influenced civic and fraternal organizations of their childhoods. When contrasted to the community-based organizations founded by their elders, the core values, iconography, symbols, rituals, spirituality, celebrations, and dedication to racial uplift and equity evidenced by black sororities and fraternities seem to be part of a continuum.

## PLEDGE PRACTICES AND RITUALS

There are African antecedents to many of the BGLO pledge rituals. According to Dr. Asa Hilliard's work on ancient African educational systems, the components of the now-illegal pledge rituals mirror the categories, and quite possibly the purposes, of the "Mystery Schools" of Egypt and the initiation systems of West Africa. Hilliard quotes George G. M. James in listing the following ten virtues that were sought by students in the ancient Egyptian Mystery System:[8]

1. Control of thought
2. Control of action
3. Devotion of purpose
4. Faith in the master's ability to teach the truth
5. Faith in one's ability to assimilate the truth
6. Faith in oneself to wield the truth
7. Freedom from resentment under persecution
8. Freedom from resentment under wrong
9. Ability to distinguish right from wrong
10. Ability to distinguish the real from the unreal

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As Hilliard notes, these educational tenets are quite different from those of whites and are in marked contrast to the educational norms advocated by the schools that the BGLO founders attended. Yet these tenets reinforced the loyalty, discipline, values, and tenacity that the organizations wanted to instill in their potential members.

However, if the values being instilled during pledging were in keeping with an Egyptian model, the actual process was more akin to the initiation system of West Africa, as described by Pierre Erny in his book *Childhood and Cosmo.*[9] Hilliard notes that the following elements were commonly included in West African initiations (denoted by italicized text), and James Brunson[10] draws parallels with the BGLO pledge process (regular text):

1. *The initiates were physically segregated from the regular activity of daily life.* In the BGLO pledge process, the pledge line is formed. Pledges are required to interact, learn as much about one another as possible, work together, and depend on one another, with as little assistance as possible from outside sources, except, of course, their deans (master teachers).

2. *They retreated from their familiar environment to an environment that enabled them to get more directly in touch with nature. This symbolized a move from the infantile situation to a situation that allowed for more maturity.* BGLO pledges are put into pressured situations that require them to get in touch with the psychological inner self and intellect, utilize their individual and group creativity, and use their resourcefulness to achieve goals and self-actualization.

3. *The initiates joined with other initiates of the same age and shared their lives in common, since the common living experience was also a common learning experience.* BGLO pledges are at times required to eat, sleep, live, and study together; visit their big brothers and big sisters; review required learning materials together; and attend pledge meetings with big brothers and big sisters. The aim is that they get to know one another as one would know blood brothers or sisters.

4. *The initiates were separated from their parents in addition to being separated from the larger community.* BGLO pledges may be put into situations known as social probation, wherein they are denied social interaction with anyone outside the classroom or pledge line. They are not allowed to talk, socially interact with others, or engage in any behavior that calls into question the dynamic of ostracization.

5. *The initiates had to renounce all that recalled their past existence.* BGLO pledges state an allegiance to the tenets of the organization into which they are

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being initiated. They are given specific expectations that also demand a fuller respect for humanity.

6. *The initiates were taught by the old men and old women of the village or town.* BGLO pledges are taught the philosophic and pragmatic aspects of the organization, as well as the ideologies inherent to Greek-letter organizations. They learn fraternity or sorority and chapter history, poems, information regarding other chapters, myths of the organization, and the Greek alphabet, among other things.

7. *The initiates frequently went nude or wore clothes made of grass to symbolize the clothes of the first men and women.* BGLO pledges are expected to wear uniforms or outfits signifying their status as initiates, as outlined by the specific organization. Mandatory attire may include dresses (worn every day or on a specific day), shirts and ties, army jackets and boots, beanie caps or hats, and the like; in addition, shaving one's head or facial hair may be required.

8. *The initiates underwent purification baths.* BGLO initiates often undergo a series of trials designed to bring them from darkness to light.

9. *During the course of initiation, a number of tests of audacity, courage, fasting, flogging, hazing, mutation, and scarification were conducted. (The purpose was to give the initiate the opportunity to demonstrate a refusal to take life as it is given, as a way of opening the mind to beauty, joy, and ecstasy.)* BGLO initiates are sent through a variety of trials during a week-long ordeal referred to as "ship," "hell week," "probation," or "crossing the sand," which are designed to test their desire to be members of the organization.

10. *Initiates learned a new and secret language.* Newly initiated BGLO members are given the passwords, grips (handshakes), signs, and secret signals for that specific organization.

11. *Initiates were given new names.* During hell week, BGLO candidates are given preliminary names, such as "dog" or "probate,"[11] and line and number names that are subsequently transformed after initiation.

12. *The initiation processes symbolize a rebirth.* After crossing the burning sands, initiated BGLO members become neophytes (new in the light) of their organization.

13. *The initiation process included a number of exercises and things to be learned, including physical and military training, songs, dances, and how to handle sacred things such as math and tools.* BGLO pledges learn rituals, songs, poems, history, and Greek literature; these things are perceived as being relevant to the organization's continuing existence. These ideas are passed from one pledge class or line to another.

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Anyone initiated into a BGLO before the reforms of the early 1990s is certain to connect these elements of West African initiations with the activities known as probation or hell week. During this final week before initiation, probates received new names; endured physical or psychological hazing, or both; learned the secrets of the organization; dressed in distinctive, identical clothes; renounced the individuality of their past lives; and learned from their big brothers or sisters. These activities often took place in new or different locales that were segregated from their normal environs.

The tradition of "crossing the burning sands" turns out to be an African carryover as well. When the fraternity and sorority members mimicked Masonic ritual behavior, they may not have know that it was Kemetic in origin. However, in an account of a Shriners temple that in 2000 opened its heretofore secret ceremony to the public,[12] we are told that initiates were required to face east and cross the burning sands.[13] This activity and the nomenclature are common to all BGLOs. Moreover, the antecedents of this Masonic rite of passage are undoubtedly African. For Africans, Masons, and, later, BGLOs, this practice was part of the final test, and the "crossing" was made difficult to prove the potential members' allegiance to their new brotherhood or sisterhood.

## GOING OVER OR COMING OUT PARTIES

Another unconscious ritual is the celebration held after initiation. These festivities are major events on many college campuses, particularly those that mandate that all "pledging" activities begin and end on the same day. In her analyses of African title associations and African American benevolent associations, Kyuk examined the final elements of initiation in several parts of West Africa. The relaxed, public, secular events that she describes are strikingly similar to the "going over" or "coming out" parties commonly hosted by black sororities and fraternities when introducing their new constituents to the campus community. However, it is not surprising that the children of members of benevolent societies and Masonic orders would emulate the organizational structures and practices among which they were reared.[14]

## AFRICAN AESTHETICS

An African aesthetic has also been unknowingly preserved in a variety of ways. Many aspects of BGLO public performance thought to be characteristic of Panhellenic life are actually African retentions. Therefore, although the con-

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tinuance of an African aesthetic in black sororities and fraternities might have been "unconscious," it was unavoidable. Numerous African aesthetic values were embedded in the churches and fraternal organizations of the founders' home communities. The counterclockwise circular movement, percussion, calls, chants, call-response, ritualistic garb, and performance styles that later became synonymous with BGLOs all had African antecedents. Moreover, the survivors of the Middle Passage maintained them, and their children and grandchildren continued these practices within the sacred and secular institutions they founded and through the values they embraced.

*Branding and Tattoos.* Scarification or branding and tattooing are two examples of such retained practices. Both types of bodily adornment were common to many African ethnic groups. Frequently, systematic patterns or designs were cut or burned into the skin to confer membership in a new social class. Whether to indicate initiation or another rite of passage or to connote membership in a family or clan, these markings signified a person's new or changed status to the broader community. The same is true of the brands common to many BGLO members. Neophytes are often branded soon after initiation. Notably, it is the men who have continued this tradition, although there are anecdotal stories of women being branded, particularly in the late 1940s and early 1950s. However, during the 1990s, as the African practice of tattooing became more popular, there was a marked increase in the number of women and men who opted for tattoos indicating their organizational affiliations.

*Calls.* Calls and greetings represent another retention common to BGLOs, as evidenced by the call-response pattern of the intra- and inter-Greek salutations.[15] The Alpha Kappa Alpha "Skee-Wee," the Omega barking sound, the Delta "Ooo-oop," the Kappa "Nupe," and the intrasororal "Skee-Oop" often heard on the Howard University campus all followed the traditional pattern of the greeter offering the call and the respondent repeating the same sound. Just as the clergy's request for an "amen" from the congregation and the interplay between the jazz soloist and the ensemble have been categorized as African American manifestations of the African call-response pattern, so too is the tradition of greetings common to BGLOs.

*Performance.* The general public is most familiar with two components of black Greek life: community service activities (often evidenced by fund-raisers for local scholarship funds) and public performances at what have come to be

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known as step shows. These shows originally took place on college campuses and were associated with the probates' activities during the final week before initiation. They were sometimes followed (or supplanted) by performances by the neophytes of each organization. By the early 1960s, many campuses had begun to charge admission for competitive shows that featured either the pledges or the members of the organizations. Fellow NPHC members often traveled from neighboring colleges to perform or to cheer their brothers and sisters on. Proceeds from these events usually went to charity. During the late 1970s to early 1980s, as the number of young BGLO alumni dramatically increased,[16] so did the popularity of step shows. In cities such as Philadelphia, the Rho Theta Omega chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority found that its annual competition drew Greeks and non-Greeks from throughout the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions while generating hefty revenues. Outside entrepreneurs soon noticed the profitability of these events, and what had been the exclusive province of BGLOs looking to generate funds for their communities was often co-opted by event planners and television producers who did not share the same commitment to community engagement.

Just as BGLO commitment to community service had an African antecedent, so too did the organizations' performances. However, this realm of black Greek life could best be described as syncretized, because only recently have a significant number of BGLO members become aware of the African origins of much of their performance style.

The music and movement of African belief systems were preserved in religious practices in the Americas. Circular counterclockwise movement, crucial to making connections with the deities, remained intact in Afro-Christian and Christian practices. They similarly permeated the secular dance, song, oratorical, and performance rituals of the plantation and post-emancipation societies. The ritualistic behaviors found in the Masonic lodges and other fraternal organizations of late-nineteenth-century black communities had their roots in the religions and values of the Kongo societies from which the majority of North America's enslaved hailed. Logically, the behavior of these adults (particularly their public parade stances, dances, and songs) influenced the college students of the time. We see the call-response, the counterclockwise movement, the percussive use of hands and feet, and other elements of an African aesthetic in the ongoing public and private conduct of these organizations' members. There is also growing evidence that cross-cultural exchanges between African and African American students and performers may have contributed to the African characteristics of the performance rituals, dances, and

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music common to black sororities and fraternities. Studies of stepping argue that early-twentieth-century cultural exchanges between North American and South African students and performers may account for similarities between African American stepping and South African boot-dancing.[17] The organization Step Afrika! began promoting exchanges between South African gumboot dancers and African American steppers. This activity has now expanded to include students and artists from multiple genres during an annual December arts confab in Soweto.[18]

*Music.* Since ethnomusicologists can trace the sacred and secular musical traditions that resonate with rural and urban black communities and with college students to Africa, it is reasonable to surmise that the music of the BGLOs also contained African influences. Although the performance styles of BGLO members went through a period of emulating white musical traditions in the 1920s and 1930s, that waned after World War II. The growing civil rights movement and increasing self-assurance about their culture and its value resulted in public musical performances that were more closely aligned with the black church and with rhythm and blues, both of which have African roots. In fact, we see a contemporary demonstration of that trend in the "party walks" performed by twenty-first-century sorority members. Though embracing a hip-hop theme, these routines are still underscored by African-based aesthetics, even when the women choose to emphasize singing rather than relying exclusively on "stepping."[19]

*Stepping.* No twentieth-century phenomenon was more publicly representative of black Greekdom than stepping. Originally the exclusive province of the men of Omega Psi Phi, this percussive performance style was later adopted by the men, and then the women, of the other BGLOs.[20] It has since spread to sacred and secular organizations, and as Elizabeth Fine notes, there are now Christian step team competitions; high school, secondary school, and elementary school teams; and steppers in Asian, Latino, and other multicultural sororities and fraternities.[21] Yet, despite the popularity of shows such as *Stomp* and popular culture's fascination with stepping, it is still most closely aligned and associated with the traditions of BGLOs.

Dr. Hayward "Woody" Faraar asserts: "Anyone who has seen a step show will notice the percussive syncopated steps, the heavily made up or disguised dancers, the oftimes satirical or derisive songs, and the rhythmic parading either in a circle, a line, or a group of lines. All these derive from West African

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dance forms."[22] Though he does not dismiss the contributions of Masonic rituals, African and African American military marches, tap dancing, a cappella and doo-wop singing of the 1950s, and black high school and college cheerleading to modern-day stepping, he foregrounds the African influence. Since all these newer influences are also heavily influenced by readily traceable West or South African religious and musical traditions, the African antecedents are evident.

One less evident connection stems from a twentieth-century cross-fertilization directly related to the growth and development of South African *mbube,* the music that informs South African boot-dancing. The music to which many of the early gum-boot dancers performed emanates from a tradition said to incorporate a rich mixture of Western, Afro-American, traditional Zulu, and modern stylistic sources. In the liner notes to the CD *Mbube Roots,* compiler Veit Erlmann recounts a "pre-history" heavily influenced by the 1890–1898 visits to South Africa by Orpheus McAdoo's Minstrel, Vaudeville, and Concert Company. McAdoo was one of the first African Americans of note to visit South Africa, and his two tours lasted five years and were said to have been phenomenally successful.

Best known among the South African troupes that began to emulate McAdoo was the Durban-based Ohalange choir led by Reuben T. Caluza. Caluza is considered South Africa's most popular and innovative composer between World War I and the early 1930s, and Erlmann attributes the emergence of precursor styles of *mbube* to mission-educated performers such as Caluza. However, it is Caluza's Hampton University (Virginia) training that is of greater interest, because we can identify a second connection between his style and the sounds and movements of the stepping and boot-dancing of the 1980s and 1990s. It is the four-part harmony, Negro spirituals, and Western musical training of Caluza's undergraduate years as a music major at Hampton and his graduate training at Columbia University (New York City) that we hear in his choirs and in the varied South African choirs that he and other colleagues trained at historically black colleges and universities would direct. It is this choral tradition of the 1930s and 1940s that would later be mimicked. In fact, the conversion from the traditional *ngoma* songs to the four-part harmony that came to distinguish *mbube* is said to have a long history among African mission converts in South Africa. When we look back and realize that many of those mission converts were trained by Caluza and his students, our understanding of the similarities in the BGLO and boot-dancing performances is enhanced. While Caluza was training young musicians and music educators in

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Durban, his Hampton classmates were doing the same in countless segregated schools throughout the United States.

*Canes.* The use of canes by members of Kappa Alpha Psi and, more recently, Phi Beta Sigma is another example of an unconscious iconographic retention. Although research on this subject is somewhat inconclusive, there are several instances in which the African origins of the canes used by steppers, dancers, and Brazilian practitioners of the martial art form *Maculele* (which is also a dance) are documented.[23] Paul Rich and David Marchant offer examples of Masonic canes that they identify as both African retentions and antecedents to the BGLO use first popularized by the Kappas.[24] Similarly, after explaining the cane's connections to ancient and Christian lore, the author of the Web site *The History of the Kane: Why Kappas Carry Kanes* notes that "the history of the cane also ties in with the African Rights [*sic*] of Passage, and was a symbol of manhood that had to be carried by initiates wishing to become adult members of their respective tribe."[25] Moreover, *The History of Swing Dancing: African Influences* segment titled "Something in the Hand" tells us that "African ritual dance makes use of special objects, including masks and costumes. In this country, African Americans continued to use sticks or staffs, cloth, and other objects in dance. Handkerchiefs, canes, and top hats became part of the dance, as did other objects in stage routines."[26] One could therefore speculate that the use of canes is another example of the adoption of an African-derived Masonic practice by members of early BGLOs.

## Conscious Acts

Although certain perpetuations of an African aesthetic by BGLOs might have been unconscious, an understanding of Egypt's connection to Africa clearly was not. All eight organizations drew clear connections to Egypt. Their original names, colors, icons, symbols, rituals, language, and overt connections to Greek deities of Egyptian origin could in some instances be viewed as a continuation of the "masking" tradition so vital to African oral traditions, literature, and music. Just as the naming of the *African* Methodist Episcopal Church implied a rejection of eighteenth-century white pejorative definitions of Africa, the selections made by BGLO founders affirmed that Egypt was a part of their heritage at a time when students were being taught to say "Egypt *and* Africa." Moreover, for the Cornell students, there was another set of dynamics

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in play, because their campus was replete with Egyptian iconography that their white classmates had appropriated. The *Cornellian* yearbooks from 1905 to 1907 list a sphinx head as the symbol for the College of Architecture, a Civil Engineering Society named "Pyramid," a "Sphinx Head" senior society, and a Mummy Club, many of which exist to this day.[27] The yearbook also lists a pyramid, an obelisk, and other Egyptian icons as the symbols for Alpha Tau Omega, the prestigious white fraternity in whose house some of the Alpha Phi Alpha founders worked.[28] Placed within that context, the Alpha founders' choices can be viewed not only as an act of affirmation but also as an act of insurgence, serving as a reminder to their schoolmates that they had far more "right" to these Egyptian icons than anyone else.

The men of Alpha Phi Alpha laid further claim by naming their national magazine the *Sphinx*. The women of Delta Sigma Theta selected the Greek goddess Minerva as their icon, and although this choice was outwardly "European," it might have had a very different meaning, since Minerva was successor to the most lauded and powerful Egyptian deity, Isis. Such choices seem to reveal a greater awareness of, interest in, and sense of connection to an African heritage during this era than might have been recognized. In fact, the *Cornell University Register* lists classes in Coptic and Ethiopian languages and literature, as well as those in Egyptian architecture.[29] The Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity history reveals a more formalized interest when the noted historian and Howard University faculty member (1922–1959) Dr. William Leo Hansberry established a "Negro History" column in the *Sphinx* whose sole purpose was to increase members' consciousness of the connections between ancient African, Ethiopian, and Egyptian histories and persons of African ancestry residing in the Americas.[30]

## NOMENCLATURE

A turn-of-the-century photograph of the Howard Academy Ancient History Club adorns a wall of the Howard University History Department. It affirms that secondary students, many of whom would later pursue baccalaureate study at Howard University, participated in an organized sharing of knowledge about their African past. One can speculate that as they studied Greek, Latin, philosophy, history, literature, and the arts, these budding scholars may have looked for affirmations of a glorious Kemetic past that recognized Africa's contributions to the world. Such quests could have been the inspiration for Alpha Phi Alpha founder Henry Arthur Callis, who concedes that after he and

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cofounder Eugene Jones fashioned Greek letters for the club, he was never quite satisfied because he could not find a word in Latin for what the Greeks called Africans.[31] This admission takes on additional significance when Alpha Phi Alpha is placed within the context of Cornell University's numerous Egyptian-named secret societies and white Greek-letter fraternities. Callis and Jones consciously chose to create an organization *different* from what they saw on their campus. Seemingly, Callis was consciously attesting to "Egypt *in* Africa" as he looked for the most "fitting" third Greek letter. These defiant young men were knowingly and consciously seeking a Greek name whose letters would identify them as being connected to Africa during a time when the lynching of black men and debasement of Africa were rampant. Ostensibly, Delta Sigma Theta founders were similarly motivated, selecting the African violet as their flower in a conscious acknowledgment and affirmation of their members' African heritage.[32]

## ICONOGRAPHY

Recent investigations into some of the symbols and colors associated with BGLOs avow that Egyptian iconography was central to the deliberate decisions made by the founders of the first eight BGLOs.[33] Thomas Robinson's popular Internet-disseminated message about Egyptian burial rites identifies many of them,[34] including the popular lexicon of "crossing the burning sands," which was used by all BGLOs to denote the place of testing. This practice was also part of Masonic and African testing, and the "crossing" was always difficult.[35] Robinson notes that the Egyptians believed that as the deceased journeyed toward the new world, they were led by the stars and "crescent moon" (a Phi Beta Sigma icon); first they crossed a desert, after which they reached a "place of testing." The now outlawed BGLO practice of "crossing the sands" at the end of the formal pledge period and the beginning of probation (the final week before admittance to full membership) is therefore viewed by many as an African retention.

Robinson asserts that the Alpha Kappa Alpha icon of an ivy leaf stands for Egyptian references to "nature" (as noted in the postburial lore). He further states that after crossing the desert, the first thing one would see was a sphinx (Alpha Phi Alpha) guarding a pyramid (Delta Sigma Theta). Later in the journey, one's lessons (wisdom from the deities) were presented on a scroll (Kappa Alpha Psi). Afterward, the "Lady of the West" (the goddess Sekhmet) tested the souls of the dead. Robinson believes that she represents the Zeta Phi Beta so-

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rority, and Maat, to whom one's heart was given for measurement, represents Sigma Gamma Rho. In the final stages of the after-death journey, one's last encounter is with Anubis,[36] the deity of embalming, who has the head of a jackal, which Robinson argues represents Omega Psi Phi. Needless to say, there are many parts of the Sahara where one would never see a pyramid, nor receive a scroll. And one would be hard-pressed to find ivy, or any vegetation, other than on the banks of the Nile. But the lengths to which Robinson goes to allege such connections, and the popularity of his Web site, tell us a lot about contemporary BGLO members' desires to connect themselves to the "Black Athena" posited by Martin Bernal,[37] as opposed to the ancient Greece that mainstream white sororities and fraternities claim.

### COLOR SYMBOLISM

Egyptian color symbolism is also of interest when juxtaposed with the choices BGLOs made, because repeatedly we see colors that affirm life, rebirth, strength, courage, power, and wisdom. The collective positivism of these choices is insightful. Alpha Kappa Alpha's green has two significant meanings. The first is related to the common amulet of the "Eye of Horus," or the *Wedjat.* In *Color in Egyptian Art and Jewelry,* Marie Parsons says that this symbol is usually green to connote aspects of healing and well-being.[38] Moreover, *Wedjat* was the green one, the protective serpent goddess of Lower Egypt. Second, she notes that the color green was symbolic of growing things and of life itself. To do "green things" was a euphemism for positive, life-producing behavior; in contrast, "red things," which included life-giving and protective items, such as blood, also denoted things that were hot and furious, such as fire. So the women of Alpha Kappa Alpha chose a color that represented positive, life-producing healing; well-being; and an Egyptian female deity. Interestingly, the color pink, though not on the Egyptian color palette, is the color of the Yoruba goddess Oba, the deity of education,[39] an endeavor central to the sorority's mission.

The blue common to Phi Beta Sigma, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho is said to have reminded the Egyptians of the Nile and the heavens. Moreover, blue, like green, is symbolic of growth and rebirth. Parsons says that the crimson and cream combination selected by both Delta Sigma Theta and Kappa Alpha Psi denotes completeness, whereas by itself, the cream-white selected by Zeta Phi Beta and Phi Beta Sigma is associated with cleanliness, ritual purity, and sacredness; it was the color of the clothes worn by ritual priests. Omega Psi Phi's purple, the well-known indicator of royalty, is the other color worn

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by the powerful of that era. The yellow-gold of Sigma Gamma Rho, Alpha Phi Alpha, and Omega Psi Phi was often associated with the sun, the deities, and the transition to divinity in the afterlife. Alpha Phi Alpha's black represented *Kmt,* or black land (Egypt), the fertile Nile soil, and regeneration.

In sum, the colors selected, when juxtaposed with their Egyptian meanings, tell an intriguing story; they all speak to a power, wholeness, purity, and rebirth quite contrary to the dominant culture's stereotypes. When contrasted to the demonic representations of blacks popularized by the Ku Klux Klan and (later) films such as the 1915 blockbuster *Birth of a Nation,* these students' choices could well be interpreted as acts of resistance.

## INTENTIONALITY

No undertaking was as overtly and intentionally Afrocentric as Delta Sigma Theta's 1976 film *Countdown at Kusini,* whose "plot revolved around the attempt to assassinate the leader of an African revolutionary movement who is struggling against colonialism and multinational corporations."[40] Spearheaded by Delta president Lillian Benbow's Commission on Arts and Letters, this film, though panned by critics, was a proactive response to both the "blaxploitation" stereotypes of 1970s Hollywood and calls for greater African and African American economic independence and interdependence.

More recently, in the 1980s and 1990s, we saw fraternity and sorority members intentionally emulating African attire, movements, sounds, music, and language, which seemed to parallel the growing interest in Afrocentricity. Moreover, the establishment of chapters on the African continent and consciously constructed programs of service grew throughout the twentieth century. As was pointed out in the Smithsonian exhibition and catalog *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity,* Ghana's Kente has become the global symbol or icon for Africa.[41] As such, it is recognizable in cities as far-flung as Rio de Janeiro and Beijing; it has also taken on a special meaning for African Americans, as evidenced by the spate of faux-Kente paraphernalia that proliferated during the 1990s. This trend's popularity soon spilled over to black organizations, and black sororities and fraternities were in the vanguard. In fact, the first Kente stoles were produced by Alpha Kappa Alpha entrepreneur Twyla Lang-Gordon.[42] In addition to the graduation stoles, vendors produced T-shirts, ice buckets, stemware, hats, umbrellas, plastic mugs, and countless other products bearing Kente (and later Malian mud cloth) patterns in each organization's colors.

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In some instances, the tattooing mentioned earlier may qualify as an intentional act as well. The growing popularity of henna tattoos for hands and feet has resulted in a far larger cohort of U.S. youth recognizing the North African origins of this practice. Consequently, besides being representative of hip-hop culture, for some, tattooing constitutes an intentional act of connecting to an African heritage.

Last, reviews of naming practices within organizations also reveal intentional African correlations. In recent years, we have witnessed the adoption of African names by pledge groups and for events and activities. The men of Phi Beta Sigma have been among the most visibly active in this arena. Perusal of Phi Beta Sigma national and local Web sites reveals that they identify their members by many African-related titles, including the Sons of Kush, the Blue Riders of the Camel which crosses white sands, the Masters of the Lion Judah, the Men of the Dove, and the Fraternity of African Kings, Princes, and Presidents. In addition, the men of Alpha Phi Alpha have employed African names for newly initiated members as well as for pledge lines. For example, members of Alpha Phi Alpha have used such names as Four Suns of the Nile, Four Rays of Khnemu, Pharaohs of Giza, Six Guardians of Hekeptah, and Disciples of Set. Undoubtedly, these titles affirm pride in their African ancestry and a desire by these young men to remember their forebears' greatest accomplishments.

## Presence of Black Greek-Letter Organizations on the African Continent

### MEMBERSHIP

BGLO publications reveal a long-standing interest in, concern about, and sense of connection to Africa. Organizations supported the initiation of African students at U.S. colleges and universities to varying degrees; however, African BGLO members, like their Caribbean, Canadian, and U.S. counterparts, all received basic leadership training in their undergraduate chapters. Undoubtedly, that preparation helped those who would later be catapulted to national and international prominence.

One of the earliest examples of interest in Africa is found in the Alpha Phi Alpha *Sphinx* magazine, which, beginning in the early 1920s, featured regular columns written by Howard University scholar Dr. William Leo Hansberry.[43] In 1950, Phi Beta Sigma published a "Free Africa" issue of *Crescent* magazine. In it were articles by Brother Azikiwe, Emperor Haile Selassie (not a

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brother of Sigma), W. E. B. DuBois (not a brother of Sigma), and a roundup on developments in all parts of the erstwhile "motherland" by African fraternity brothers.[44]

The organizations supported members' studying abroad in Africa and African students' studying in the United States. According to the Alpha Kappa Alpha *Ivy Leaf* magazine, sorors were studying in Africa as early as 1922.[45] However, Zeta Phi Beta's concern was so great that in 1948 it chartered the first BGLO chapter in Africa. Liberia, where this chapter was organized, would eventually host chapters of many of the BGLOs, including Alpha Kappa Alpha in 1958[46] and Delta Sigma Theta in 1960.[47] These bonds may attest to the longstanding connection between African Americans and the formerly enslaved persons who had founded Liberia. Yet, although many BGLOs eventually established chapters in Liberia, no organization reached out to African students studying in the United States with as much conviction as Phi Beta Sigma, whose membership boasted four African chiefs of state (Ghana's Nkrumah, Nigeria's Azikiwe, and Liberia's Tubman and Tobert) in the early postcolonial era.

### AFRICAN PROGRAMS OF SERVICE

During the second half of the twentieth century, one of the most important ways in which BGLOs maintained a presence on the African continent was through their ongoing support of sustainable development projects there. According to Mel Foote, now CEO of the Constituency for Africa[48] and former Africare[49] liaison to BGLOs, no organization supported sustainable development in Africa during the 1980s and early 1990s with the ardor of Alpha Kappa Alpha.[50] Former national president Janet Ballard[51] designated "Service with a Global Perspective" as the overarching program theme for her 1986–1990 administration by emphasizing the sorority's Africare partnership. In accord with the Africare initiative, chapters of Alpha Kappa Alpha adopted villages, sent contributions to a general fund to build village water wells, and took tourists and workers to the continent on cultural study tours and working vacations. Much of this interest grew from the sorority's participation in the 1986 United Nations International Women's Conference in Nairobi, where African women repeatedly said that they could not move forward without clean, potable water. African American women's organizations took this message to heart, and members of BGLOs, the National Council for Negro Women, LINKS, and black church auxiliaries came home determined to respond to their sisters' pleas. Foote said that among the sororities, Sigma Gamma Rho supported an early

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1990s project to provide grinding mills to African women,[52] and Delta Sigma Theta, though it never participated in a formal development program with Africare, provided consistent financial support for projects related to women's issues.[53] Notably, however, Delta had been actively engaged in supporting women's issues in Africa since the 1958–1963 administration of Dr. Jean Noble, who, according to Paula Giddings, "engineered closer ties between African and African American women; supported building a maternity wing in a rural Kenyan hospital, and funded 27-year-old Tanzanian Lucy Lameck's work fostering women's organizations."[54] Foote also recalled the work of two fraternities: Kappa Alpha Psi supported a food-storage project that focused on warehouse development, and the men of Omega Psi Phi, like the NAACP, worked with Africare on reforestation projects.[55]

The antiapartheid movement of the 1980s galvanized black Greeks as it did other black sacred, civic, and social organizations. Although much has been written about corporate America's response to the Sullivan principles,[56] created by Dr. Leon Sullivan, founder of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers (OIC), scant attention has been paid to BGLOs' ongoing response inspired by Sullivan and Trans Africa's Randall Kennedy. Notable among these efforts is Omega Psi Phi's South Africa Project; according to its Web site, "although apartheid has officially ended in the nation of South Africa, many black South Africans still suffer from a shortage of adequate resources and necessities. The most critical shortages are in the areas of health care and education. This humanitarian project is designed to provide assistance in these areas, particularly in the black townships."[57]

Other organizations took up Sullivan's mantle by partnering with the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH).[58] This organization was also established by Sullivan, who felt that the vocational thrust of the international arm of the OIC[59] was not sufficiently addressing Africa's educational needs. In addition to the Teachers for Africa program, he established SOS[60] to collect and distribute school supplies and the Schools for Africa initiative[61] to build schools in rural African communities.

IFESH's self-help school construction program and the parallel SOS program are designed to assist the poorest of the poor. The program currently operates in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, and its goal is to construct a thousand schools in Africa by providing basic building materials to communities in rural areas where no schools previously existed. Schools are built through a collaborative effort, with parents providing the labor and governments supplying teachers and some monitor-

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ing. Every effort is made to incorporate skills training into each project through local OIC International training centers, sister organizations to IFESH. In some instances, Teachers for Africa supplies U.S. educators, who use their sabbaticals or unpaid leaves of absence to provide administrative and classroom support. During the 1998–2002 administration of Dr. Norma Solomon White, Alpha Kappa Alpha built ten schools in rural South Africa and distributed thousands of containers of school supplies to children throughout the continent.

## Conclusion

The study of BGLOs reveals conscious and unconscious African cultural continuities, including intentional emulation of elements of African art and culture, as well as a consciously planned organizational presence on the African continent. Despite mythologized (and often demonized) depictions of Africa and Africans in nineteenth- and twentieth-century European and American historical texts, media, and popular culture,[62] members of these organizations steadfastly held on to an alternative understanding of the continent and its progeny. Therefore, when we examine their choices regarding nomenclature, iconography, organizational structure, core values, pledge practices, performance, chapter locales, and programs of service, we find that direct links to African religious practices, secret societies and title associations, aesthetics, philosophy, values, and educational norms are plentiful. The fact that these patterns can be traced from the inception of black sororities and fraternities to the present time underscores the contention that although the term *Afrocentric* was not in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century, the college students of that era, and the undergraduate and graduate BGLO members who followed them, were very much aware of their connection to an Africa that was quite different from the stereotyped misrepresentations that continue to abound.

## Notes

1. Sonya Anderson, Harvard University doctoral student, interview with the author at Dillard University, New Orleans, LA, June 24, 2003.

2. Dr. Daryl Michael Scott, Howard University historian, telephone interview with the author, May 22, 2003.

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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3. Herman Dreer et al., *The History of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity: A Brotherhood of Negro College Men, 1911–1939* (Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, 1940).

4. Ibid.

5. Dr. Robert Harris, national historian, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, interview with the author, July 3, 2003.

6. Ibid.

7. Betty M. Kuyk, "The African Derivation of Black Fraternal Orders in the United States," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, no. 4 (October 1983): 570.

8. Asa G. Hilliard, "Pedagogy in Ancient Kemet," in *Kemet and the African Worldview: Research, Rescue and Restoration*, ed. Maulana Karenga and Jacob H. Carruthers (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1986), 138, 139.

9. Ibid., 141.

10. James E. Brunson, *Frat and Soror: The African Origin of Greek-Lettered Organizations* (Southfield, MI: Cleage Group, 1991), 93–96.

11. *Probate, neophyte,* and *prophyte* are terms designating the three stages of BGLO membership. Probates are in the final stage before initiation into full membership. Neophytes are new initiates. After witnessing an initiation, neophytes (or neos, as they are sometimes called) become prophytes.

12. Max Albright, "Shriners Open Once-Secret Ceremony to Public," *Amarillo Globe-News.* http://www.amarillonet.com/stories/101500/new_shriners.shtml.

13. To join the Shriners in the Amarillo Khiva Temple, one must already be a Mason.

14. Kuyk, "African Derivation of Black Fraternal Orders," 570.

15. Eileen Southern's *The Music of Black Americans: A History, IB* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997) and works by cultural historians and ethnomusicologists Bernice Johnson Reagon, Portia Maultsby, and Melonee Burnim all discuss African call-response patterns in detail.

16. In the post-1968 era of "open access" to higher education, the number of new chapters for all BGLOs exploded as the number of students of African ancestry attending majority colleges and universities grew.

17. For a discussion of the various hypotheses, see Elizabeth Fine, *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinios Press, 2003), 78–79.

18. For the history of Step Afrika! see http://www.stepafrika.com/05_ the_ history.htm.

19. The author witnessed an example of this when Alpha Kappa Alpha's undergraduate chapter at the University of the Virgin Islands performed a "party walk" to a contemporary reggae tune during its 2000 regional conference.

20. Although Fine argues differently in *Soulstepping,* my interviews and experiences contradict her conclusions based on analyses of Howard University yearbook photos and interviews with a small number of BGLO members. Movements popularized during the 1960s by Omegas were later replicated or modified by the other BGLOs.

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21. Fine, *Soulstepping*, 12.

22. Hayward "Woody" Faraar, "The African Roots of Stepping," at http://www.ipsonet.org/congress/5/papers_pdf/hwf.pdf page 6. Jacqui Malone makes similar assertions in *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

23. Some accounts of the Brazilian dance forms Maculele and Capoiera refer to the use of "Maculele canes" (www.azcentral.com/style/articles/1115dance.html), even though they are two distinct dances.

24. Paul Rich and David Marchant, "Freemasonry, the Greeks and Stepping" (paper presented at the National Conference on Stepping, April 6–7, 2001, University of the Americas, Puebla, Mexico), at info.pue.udlap.mx/~rich/papers/stepping2001.pdf.

25. http://www.angelfire.com/tx5/LJones/kanehistory.html.

26. http://www.savoystyle.com/african.html.

27. *Cornellian* 37 (1905): 36, 271; 39 (1906–1907): 238, 239, 290, 337.

28. Harris interview.

29. *Cornell University 1905–1906 Register* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, May 1906).

30. Kenneth M. Jennings Jr., "The African-Centered Focus of Early Alpha Phi Alpha," *Sphinx* (Summer 1997): 42.

31. See Skip Mason's Web site on Henry Arthur Callis at http://www.skipmason.com/callis.htm.

32. Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), 50.

33. The story of Callis's search for a more "African" third letter for the name of Alpha Phi Alpha (recounted at http://www.skipmason.com/callis.htm) and Giddings's (*In Search of Sisterhood*) discussion of Delta Sigma Theta's choice of the African violet support the argument for intentionality. Also see Ismael Conway, "It's More than Stepping: An Exploration of African-American Fraternities and Sororities," *Profile* (newsletter for professional members of the National Association for Campus Activities) (June 1991): 1–10, http://www.naca.org/NACA.

34. *Greek History,* at http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/pbs/Divine%209.htm.

35. Richard B. Leigh, Kemetic scholar, Willingboro, NJ, interview with the author, July 25, 2003.

36. Anubis is the patron of mummification and of the dead on their path through the underworld. Anubis is an incredibly ancient god and was the original god of the dead before Osiris "took over" the position. After that point, Anubis became one of the many sons of Osiris and the psychopomp (conductor of souls) of the underworld. See http://touregypt.net/godsofegypt/anubis.htm.

37. Cornell University professor Martin Bernal's seminal work *Black Athena* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987) is one of the best known of the Afrocentric works with which Mary Lefkowitz and other classicists have taken issue.

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
Lexington, KY, USA: University Press of Kentucky, 2005. p 33.
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Bernal makes the case for Kemetic (Egyptian) origins of many key elements of the Greek culture that are viewed as the precursor to modern Western civilization.

38. http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/colors.htm.

39. Janice Rush, Inner Visions Worldwide Institute, Silver Spring, MD, interview with the author, October 3, 2003.

40. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 288.

41. *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity,* ed. Doran H. Ross, with contributions by Agbenyega Adedze, Abena P. A. Busia, Nii O. Quarcoopome, Betsy D. Quick, Raymond Silverman, and Anne Spencer (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998). The companion Web site is http://www.nmafa.si.edu/exhibits/kente/top.htm.

42. Through her mail-order, online, and convention business, Lang-Gordon's Atlanta-based Motherland Imports (http://motherlandimports.com/) has created and capitalized on a niche market that no one else foresaw.

43. Jennings, "African-Centered Focus of Early Alpha Phi Alpha," 42.

44. Web site text excerpted from *Our Cause Speeds On: Phi Beta Sigma,* as reprinted at the now defunct http://3n1promo.com/society/Africa.htm, published by Sigma Historical Society, 17 South 5th Street, Park Ridge, NJ 07656, 877-534-0707 ext. 157 (message), 201-921-3282 (phone), mail@SigmaHistory.cjb.net (e-mail).

45. Alpha Kappa Alpha *Ivy Leaf* 2, no. 1 (1922): 46.

46. Alpha Kappa Alpha *Ivy Leaf* 36, no. 4 (1958): 5.

47. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 257.

48. According to the Constituency for Africa's Web site (http://www.cfanet.org), its mission is to mobilize and foster increased cooperation and coordination among a broad-based coalition of American, African, and international organizations, institutions, and individuals committed to the progress and empowerment of Africa and African peoples.

49. Africare is an African American charitable organization dedicated to assisting Africa, primarily in the areas of food assistance, health, environmental justice, and HIV/AIDS. See http://www.africare.org/.

50. Mel Foote, CEO, Constituency for Africa, interview with the author, July 23, 2003.

51. The Alpha membership's lukewarm response to Ballard's "global" vision is similar to Delta members' reaction to Benbow's passion for *Countdown at Kusini* (Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 289). Ironically, despite laudatory external responses to these projects, in both instances, the membership felt that their respective presidents were not paying enough attention to domestic affairs.

52. Sigma Gamma Rho Web site: http://www.sgrho1922.org/programs.html.

53. Foote interview.

54. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 241, 257.

55. Foote interview.

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56. The Global Sullivan Principles of Corporate Responsibility (http://globalsullivanprinciples.org/principles.htm) were established to give American corporations a code of conduct to follow in their relationships with South Africa's racist regime, to foster the end of apartheid.

57. http://www.oppf.org/about/programs.asp.

58. http://www.ifesh.org/.

59. The OIC has two parts: http://www.oicinternational.org/ and www.oicofamerica.org.

60. http://www.ifesh.org/schools__sos.htm.

61. http://www.ifesh.org/schools.

62. For a thorough discussion of these trends, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993, 1995, 1996).

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# 2

# The Origin and Evolution of College Fraternities and Sororities

*Craig L. Torbenson*

> On Thursday, the 5th of December in the year of our Lord God one thousand seven hundred and seventy-six and the first of the Commonwealth, a happy spirit and resolution of attaining the important ends of Society entering the minds of John Heath, Thomas Smith, Richard Booker, Armistead Smith, and John Jones, and afterwards seconded by others, prevailed, and was accordingly ratified. And for the better establishment and sanctitude of our unanimity, a square silver medal was agreed on and instituted, engraved on the one side with SP, the initials of the Latin Societas Philosophiae, and on the other, agreeable to the former, with the Greek initials of ΦβΚ and an index imparting a philosophical design, extended to the three stars, a part of the planetary orb, distinguished.[1]

Thus begin the minutes describing the organization of Phi Beta Kappa, considered the first Greek-letter fraternity in the United States. Today there are more than 200 national fraternity and sorority organizations that are classified as social fraternities, in contrast to professional fraternities, honor societies, and recognition societies that also use Greek letters. This is, however, only part of the story; nearly ninety other national social organizations no longer exist. About 9 percent of these social fraternities and sororities are considered black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs). From their inception, most fraternities and sororities had to withstand tremendous pressure for their removal from college campuses. Over the years, however, the institution has proved to be both resourceful and resilient. Success can be attributed to the desire for social interaction on the part of college students, resulting in a general acceptance on most campuses today.

Although some may think that all college fraternities and sororities are similar, there are, in fact, many differences. Some are conservative in their poli-



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cies; others are more open-minded. Some tend to establish chapters at certain types of colleges and universities; others are associated with particular religious, racial, or ethnic groups or with specific fields of study. Some are regional in their distribution, while others are national or even international. Despite these differences, the fraternity institution has had a notable role in the lives of countless students both before and after graduation. Although the first collegiate BGLO was not established until 1906, its roots can be traced to the predominant white, male, Protestant fraternities that emerged during the early nineteenth century. Therefore, this chapter examines the origins of the typical white fraternity, and later white women's sororities, to provide the historical background for the rise of BGLOs.

## Student Life at Early U.S. Colleges

With the establishment of colleges during the colonial period, a subculture of student college life emerged that still exists today. This subculture embraces the educational and extracurricular experiences that students share while attending college. Within this subculture, numerous organizations, including fraternities and sororities, were established to meet the intellectual and social needs of students.

The majority of early U.S. colleges patterned themselves after Harvard College, which had modeled itself after Oxford and Cambridge Universities in England. In terms of structure (buildings, administration, and curriculum) and the collegiate life (dormitories, dining halls, and discipline), early U.S. colleges tried to duplicate these two English prototypes as best they could. This section examines the early American attempts to replicate important physical and social features of English colleges and their subsequent modification, all of which provided the framework for student life in U.S. colleges.[2]

Colonial schools quickly recognized the difficulties of duplicating the physical structure of their English examples. Because the population in the colonies was disbursed, colleges followed this same pattern, resulting in an educational system that was diffused and decentralized. Most colonial colleges lacked the resources to follow the architectural plans of their English models, which centered on enclosed quadrangles with only one exit. American colleges were often forced to erect one structure at a time.[3]

Most colonial colleges followed the English model of using memorization and recitation as methods of classroom learning. Structured around the Greek

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and Latin languages and literature, the curriculum consisted of a group of courses taken by all; there was no flexibility, despite an individual's interest or professional plans. Information presented in class was not to be criticized or analyzed, but rather memorized or translated and then recited in Greek or Latin. This approach left little opportunity for students to expand their thinking and tended to be tiresome and dull.[4]

The idea of the collegiate way grew out of the concept of colleges as large family-like institutions. The faculty, acting as surrogate parents, assumed responsibility for discipline. Although faculty members viewed college as a place to impart knowledge, they also saw it as a place to develop strong religious and moral character. Religion had a dominant role, and everyone observed a routine of daily prayer, religious study, and Sunday church.[5]

In the colonies, faculty had the dual responsibility of teaching and meting out discipline, which frustrated attempts to foster any student-faculty relations. This differed from the English model, where deans and proctors were responsible for discipline and the faculty concentrated on teaching and developing close associations with their students. This paternalistic attitude of the colonial faculty resulted in the everyday lives of students being highly structured. Eating, sleeping, studying, and socializing were all supervised. A long list of "don'ts" left students with little freedom to diverge from a routine that some described as "pay, pray, study, and accept." For those guilty of infractions, the ultimate punishment was dismissal, though this was used sparingly, since the college relied on students' parents paying their tuition.[6]

The colonial college also tried to duplicate the dormitory, which was the heart of the English educational experience. Dormitories encouraged interaction, brought students and faculty together outside of the classroom, and enabled faculty to keep a close eye on students. The colonial dormitory, however, was less successful. With limited funds, American colleges constructed one building at a time, and when a dormitory was built, it was often located some distance from the classroom buildings, making it difficult to enforce the rules and regulations.[7]

The colonial dormitories were crude and lacked many of the simple comforts of life. For the young men inhabiting the dormitories, the Spartan conditions aggravated the situation. Tempers wore thin, and frequent confrontations erupted. Several disputes resulted in death, such as when two students at South Carolina College grabbed the same plate of food and resolved their conflict with a duel in 1833. In such a difficult environment, students were easily incited to protest a variety of issues related to the educational process. They of-

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ten led boycotts and rebellions that resulted in the destruction of school property. The faculty, and often the public, viewed these actions as inappropriate behavior, but the students saw these activities as a break from the boring curriculum of memorization and recitation.[8]

The colonial college copied the English system of dividing the student body into freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior classes. This class division was central to understanding certain aspects of college life in America. Since enrollments were small, students who entered college lived, studied, socialized, and graduated together, and many friendships developed. Class designation was therefore the first form of student association. Though never an official organization, each class had its own rituals, customs, insignia, and clothes and provided important social activities for members. In this hierarchy, the freshmen were on the bottom, in a position of servitude to members of the upper classes. This strengthened the bonding of each incoming class and made interclass rivalry a significant part of college life. By 1725, social standing also became important for students at Harvard, where members of each class were ranked according to their fathers' social position.[9]

Many aspects of student life found new meaning and purpose in college fraternities and sororities. Freshman servitude, known as "fagging" in English colleges, evolved in the colonies to become hazing by the early 1800s. Incidents of hazing were often humiliating and sometimes dangerous. Typical hazing incidents included consuming large amounts of drink or food, performing worthless and mundane tasks, or participating in various stunts. One aspect of hazing was the rush. Initially an all-out fight or brawl between freshman and sophomore classes, rush later became an organized activity such as a wrestling match or football game.[10]

Although class standing was an important foundation for many student organizations, its role declined as some colleges ceased to provide housing for students. The college fraternity also had a role in this decrease. Early in their history, fraternities selected members from one class only; thus, there were sophomore, junior, and senior fraternities. By the 1900s, however, college fraternities selected their members from all four classes.[11]

Within this early collegiate world, students had little freedom. Whereas the faculty saw college as a period of self-denial, students saw college as a time to be enjoyed while preparing for the future. These differing viewpoints created tensions and frequent clashes between faculty and students. Students attempted to take control of college life with the establishment of clubs, societies, and fraternities. The faculty had different ideas, however, and responded with

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stricter rules as they supervised many student organizations. Despite faculty control, or perhaps because of it, these organizations functioned well, giving students an outlet to interact with others in a social and intellectual atmosphere. In time, however, students wanted more freedom to pursue their own interests without faculty intervention. The result was a proliferation of student organizations to meet the various needs of the student body.[12]

## Student Organizations

In 1703, the first known student organization in British North America was established at Harvard. Its purpose was to allow students to pray together and mingle under faculty guidance within a religious context. Like the colonial college, early student organizations had religious orientations. By 1719, however, a number of more secular organizations had been established. Meeting in student rooms, members read poems and discussed topics while smoking and drinking.[13]

The formation of a student organization was often based on a specific interest or idea of a few individuals. Most of these organizations were short-lived, and when their members graduated, they ceased to exist. Despite a proliferation of student organizations during the early 1700s, it was not until the late 1700s that these organizations recruited members and were thereby able to exist beyond the college careers of those who established them.[14]

Literary societies and debating clubs, which enjoyed their greatest popularity between 1760 and 1860, emerged as the most important student organizations. The proliferation of these societies and clubs can be attributed to the general atmosphere of political excitement in the colonies and to the changes brought about by the Enlightenment. Literary societies helped fill a void in the educational process by providing students with the opportunity to develop skills in speaking and writing. They also provided a spirit of intellectualism that was lacking in the college classroom because of the emphasis on rote learning and recitation.[15]

Usually, each campus had two or three literary societies that vied for members, student positions, and honors. Competition was often fierce. Each society was essentially a college within a college. It enrolled students, held classes, published magazines, and passed out diplomas. The literary society sometimes had a larger and better library than the college itself. To distinguish their members, many societies used secret initiation rites, mottoes, and badges. As a re-

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sult, membership and activities in literary societies often became more important than the curriculum of the college.[16]

## College Fraternities and Sororities

Although other factors contributed to the decline of literary societies, their demise is closely associated with the rise of fraternities and sororities, which engendered a higher degree of loyalty. The idea of fraternity or brotherhood was not peculiar to U.S. college students, and many student organizations existed in Europe. However, although attempts have been made to establish a link between European student organizations and the U.S. college fraternity, the evidence suggests that the social fraternity is unique to the United States.[17]

A fraternity or sorority was the creation of a few individuals who had similar values and ideals and wanted to maintain close associations while in college. Their goals often included correcting the perceived wrongs of the college administration, providing activities for students, and obtaining more rights for students. In reality, however, their purpose was to create a compatible brotherhood or sisterhood for friendship. Although BGLOs were not established to correct the wrongs of the college administration, several were established to promote the struggle against racism. Like the white fraternities and sororities, BGLOs were established by groups of like-minded individuals who desired to maintain contact and provide activities and brotherhood or sisterhood for their group.[18]

Fraternities and sororities had many characteristics in common with the literary societies, including the use of pins, badges, secret initiation rites, and mottoes. The fraternity system differed, however, with its use of Greek letters representing the organization's motto and its reliance on initiation rituals from the Masonic order. A couple of early college traditions, rush and hazing, took on new meaning within the social fraternity system. The initial documents of many fraternities and, later, sororities set out the goals for these organizations, which generally included maintaining high standards of scholarship, perpetuating brotherhood or sisterhood, striving for excellence as an individual, developing leadership qualities, and, for some organizations, participating in service activities at the school and in the community. Many of these goals were common to both white fraternal and sororal organizations and BGLOs, although the wording may have been somewhat different. Thus, whereas liter-

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ary societies once filled the intellectual vacuum of college life, Greek-letter fraternities filled the social vacuum. In a fraternity, one could find brotherhood and escape from mundane class work and religious training. Drinking, smoking, card playing, singing, and womanizing—behavior not generally condoned—became institutionalized in the fraternity. These activities had always been a way of escape for college students, but the fraternity gave this behavior new meaning.[19]

Phi Beta Kappa, the prototype of the college fraternity, was established at William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1776. Similar to other student organizations of the time, Phi Beta Kappa functioned as a literary society, sponsoring essay writing, debates, and orations. It had its own rules for debate, and some of the discussion topics included "the advantages of an established Church," "the justice of African slavery," and "whether anything is more dangerous to civil liberty in a free state than a standing army in time of peace." Besides the scholarly activities of Phi Beta Kappa, this organization departed from the norm by also serving as a vehicle for social activities. The members devised a number of secret aspects, such as the handshake, motto, sign, and password, to identify those who belonged. An initiation ritual in Greek and Latin explained the organization's secrets. This aspect was not unique to Phi Beta Kappa, for other student organizations often used secrecy, but never with such a heavy emphasis.[20]

Two of the founders of Phi Beta Kappa and eight subsequent members were Masons; therefore, Masonic influence can be assumed. Certainly a model of symbology was provided from which adaptations could be made. One Masonic characteristic that Phi Beta Kappa most likely adopted was the idea of establishing chapters at other locations in Virginia. However, the idea of expanding to other states was an innovation unique to Phi Beta Kappa. The expansion process worked as follows: The mother chapter at William and Mary granted a charter to an individual who wanted to establish a chapter. This individual took the charter, a piece of paper on which the fraternity's constitution was written, and tore it in half. The mother chapter kept half of the charter, and the new chapter retained the other half. This charter could be withdrawn if the new chapter proved unworthy of the fraternity's ideals.[21]

Phi Beta Kappa expanded initially in the South. By 1780, the fraternity had established chapters at some twenty colleges and within numerous communities. These early chapters are known as the "lost chapters," because there are no accurate records of them. Expansion to the North occurred at Yale Col-

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lege and Harvard University in 1780 and 1781. Between 1787 and 1830, additional chapters at Dartmouth College (1787), Union College (1817) in New York, Bowdoin College (1825) in Maine, and Brown College (1830) in Rhode Island increased the geographic territory and influence of this organization. Since communication among these early chapters was infrequent, each developed and operated as an autonomous unit. Consequently, a variety of traditions and practices emerged at each school.[22]

During the latter part of the 1820s, an antisecrecy movement swept the country, prompted by the disappearance of William Morgan, who was about to publish a book exposing the secrets of Masonry. Throughout the United States, many people were increasingly of the opinion that Masons exerted undue political, social, and economic control or influence. A public outcry against such secret organizations culminated in the establishment of the Anti-Masonic Party in 1831; its main platform was the elimination of all secret societies. Phi Beta Kappa was often associated with the Masons, so to distance itself, the organization published its secret rites and became an honorary society in 1831.[23]

The next recorded appearance of a Greek-letter organization occurred thirty-six years after the founding of Phi Beta Kappa. In 1812, four one-time initiates of Phi Beta Kappa at the University of North Carolina organized Kappa Alpha, which eventually expanded to include some twenty-one chapters throughout the South. It is very likely that this fraternity was an offspring of one of the community chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, for its constitution, rituals, and secrets were very similar. Local fraternities were established at Union (1813), Yale (1821), and Princeton College (1824). Many local organizations were established because their petitions for Phi Beta Kappa charters were not promptly acted on or had been denied.[24]

Although Phi Beta Kappa is recognized as the first fraternity, it was not until the late 1820s and early 1830s that the fraternity movement became firmly established. A Phi Beta Kappa chapter at Union (1817) had competition from a local fraternity, Phi Beta Gamma (1823). Both organizations eventually came under faculty control, leading students to establish three new organizations that used Greek letters and implemented many of the characteristics of Phi Beta Kappa. Known as the Union Triad, Kappa Alpha Society (1825), Sigma Phi (1827), and Delta Phi (1827) launched the fraternity movement and set the pattern for the creation of new fraternities. Because three additional fraternities, Psi Upsilon (1833), Chi Psi (1841), and Theta Delta

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Chi (1847), were also established at Union, this school is referred to as the "Mother of Fraternities."[25]

The emergence of the fraternity, then, is the culmination of processes that involved early colonial colleges and the subsequent development of student college life. Certainly the struggle over whether faculty or students should control student college life had a major role in the creation of the social fraternity. As the prototype, Phi Beta Kappa left its legacy to the college fraternity movement, with its heavy emphasis on secrecy and expansion to other colleges.

The origins of women's fraternities, or sororities, are associated with the coeducational colleges of the Midwest and South, not the women's colleges of the East. Since they were a minority on coeducational campuses, women organized to unite their small numbers and give them a stronger position in campus activities. Clearly, the creation of women's organizations was an imitation of the already well-established men's fraternities.[26]

Before the 1830s, few women attended male-dominated colleges; rather, they went to female "academies" or "seminaries." As the number of women attending college increased, however, many predominantly male colleges opted to become coeducational. The question logically arose as to whether women should be allowed to join fraternities. There was no ban on women members, for this had never been an issue, and although a few fraternities allowed women to join, most excluded them. There are few recorded examples of women joining chapters of national fraternities. One of the earliest is from a chapter of Sigma Alpha Epsilon at the Kentucky Military Institute around 1860–1861. Other organizations known to have female members included Beta Theta Pi, Phi Delta Theta, and Pi Kappa Alpha; there may have been others. The women of Pi Kappa Alpha seem to have been members of the community who used their homes for entertainment, provided food for fraternity members, and decorated the chapter hall. Some national organizations debated for several years whether women should be admitted as members. Attempts were made to include women by giving them some sort of peripheral status, but women objected and insisted on full membership. When this was not obtained, they created their own organizations to provide comparable activities.[27]

The earliest women's organizations were established at the first women's college—Wesleyan (Georgia) in 1851 and 1852. These secret literary societies used classical names that were later changed to the Greek letters Alpha Delta Pi and Phi Mu. They remained local organizations until the early 1900s. Pi Beta Phi (or I. C. Sorosis, until 1888) has the distinction of being the first national

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women's fraternity. Organized in 1867 at Monmouth College (Illinois), it patterned itself after the male fraternity in organization and manner of expansion. With the establishment of its second chapter in 1869, it became a national organization.[28]

The first women's organization to use Greek letters was Kappa Alpha Theta, organized by Bettie Locke in 1870 at DePauw University (Indiana). Locke's father and brother both belonged to a fraternity. When her brother's fraternity offered her a pin so that she could be a champion of the organization, she asked to be a full member. The chapter members turned her down, and her father suggested that she begin her own organization. The first sorority was established in 1874 at Syracuse University. Gamma Phi Beta was a "society" prior to 1882, when a Latin professor suggested the use of the term *sorority*. This term soon became popular to distinguish female and male fraternities.[29]

## GEOGRAPHIC PATTERNS OF ORIGIN

Studying the geographic patterns of origin for nearly 200 fraternities and sororities established between 1776 and 1975 (including those that ceased to exist) reveals that only 101 schools had national organizations originate on their campuses. Thirty-five of these schools were points of origin for more than one fraternity or sorority, and fourteen schools gave rise to four or more. The largest cluster was in New York State and included the following schools: City University of New York, New York University, Union College, Syracuse University, Cornell University, Columbia University, Hunter College, Barnard College, and Cooper Union. New York University and the City University of New York claimed seven organizations each, and Cornell and Union had six each.[30]

A second cluster occurred in Virginia and included Longwood College, Virginia Military Institute, University of Virginia, Washington and Lee College, Roanoke College, and William and Mary College. Longwood and Washington and Lee Colleges each had four organizations originate on their campuses. The school credited with the largest number of organizations was Miami University of Ohio, with eight. A few other schools had three or more, including the University of California–Berkeley, University of Missouri, University of Illinois, Howard University (Washington, D.C.), Brown University, Boston University, Washington and Jefferson College, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University.

Nearly 100 national organizations have been established since 1975. About 79 percent of these organizations were established in six states: California (26),

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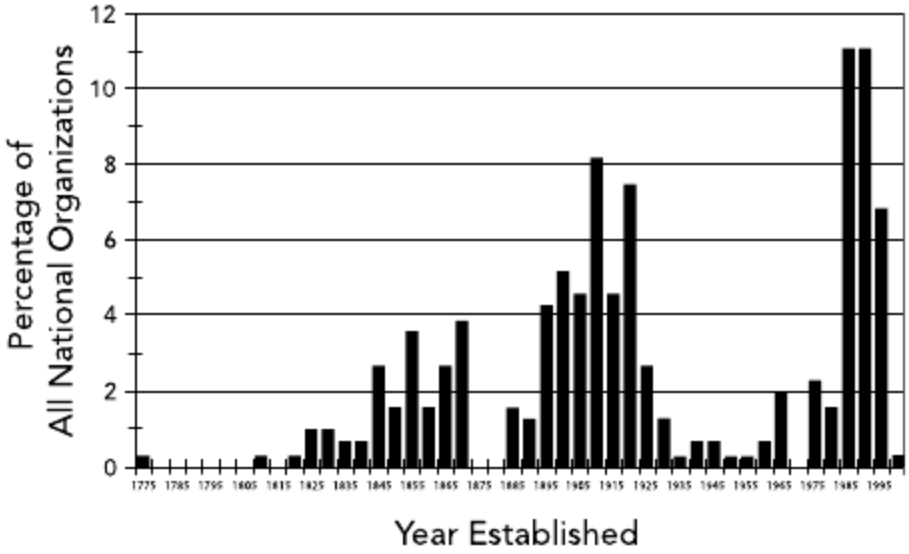


Figure 2.1. Founding of fraternities and sororities.

New York (22), Texas (9), Illinois (8), New Jersey (7), and Michigan (5). The leading schools include the University of Texas, with five new organizations, and five schools with four organizations each: University of California–Chico, State University of New York (SUNY)–Albany, SUNY–Buffalo, SUNY–Binghamton, and University of Illinois.

Figure 2.1 plots by five-year periods when national fraternities and sororities originated. The figure identifies three waves of establishment. During the first wave, 1825 to 1874, 20 percent of all national organizations were established. These were the traditional Greek-letter organizations; 94 percent were fraternities with white, male, Protestant members. In the second wave, 1885 to 1929, 40 percent of all national organizations were established. Of this number, 19 percent catered to African Americans, Jews, or various religious groups, and 33 percent were sororities. The third wave began in 1975 and ended in 1999, accounting for 33 percent of all national organizations. Only a few were traditional white fraternities or sororities, as this group of new organizations catered to a more diverse student body. The largest number of new organizations was for Hispanics or Latinos, followed by those for blacks. These

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three periods, or waves, were responsible for approximately 94 percent of all fraternities and sororities established since 1776.

Four geographic areas are important in terms of the origin of college fraternities and sororities. In chronological order, they are east-central New York, Greater Virginia, west-central New York, and the Midwest Belt. The "Cradle of Social Fraternities" formed in east-central New York, which can be separated into a northern and a southern core. The northern core was in place by 1835 and centered on Union College, where four fraternities had been established by 1834. Two other colleges formed this northern core—Hamilton and Williams—each of which had a fraternity. Of the five colleges in the region, three had fraternities. The southern core focused on Yale in Connecticut, where three fraternities had been established by 1848. The three other institutions in this southern core—Wesleyan, New York University, and Columbia—each had one fraternity. By 1848, Union had also added two new fraternities. Of the nine colleges located in the southern core, four were birthplaces for college fraternities. By 1848, then, a fraternity culture core area had emerged, extending from metropolitan New York up the Hudson and Mohawk Rivers to Schenectady and Clinton. The eastern boundary included the western half of Connecticut and the western one-third of Massachusetts. Of the fifteen fraternities established from 1825 to 1848, fourteen were located here, and of the fifteen schools in the area, seven were places of origin.

The Greater Virginia region became important as a place of origin following the Civil War. Seven schools in this area gave rise to fraternities and sororities between 1855 and 1901. Longwood and Washington and Lee Colleges each had four—Longwood with sororities and Washington and Lee with fraternities. The University of Virginia and the Virginia Military Institute each had three, followed by Roanoke with two. Falling just outside this Greater Virginia region is Howard University in the District of Columbia and two other Virginia schools—Richmond and William and Mary. Howard was the place of origin for six BGLOs—three fraternities and three sororities.

The last two regions of importance were west-central New York and the Midwest Belt, both of which gained significance during the early 1900s. In west-central New York, Cornell and Syracuse University formed the core, with seven and five new fraternities and sororities, respectively. Other schools included Hobart College, SUNY–Buffalo, and the University of Rochester. Prior to 1910, only four college fraternities had originated at these schools, but by 1924, another seven had been established. In the Midwest Belt, Miami University was the nucleus, with five fraternities and three sororities. Other schools

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included DePauw and Ohio State University, each with two; four additional schools had one organization each.

Since 1975, the importance of New York State has been reinforced with the addition of at least twenty-two new organizations. The creation of eight new organizations in Illinois has added to this region's significance. Another important area to emerge during this period is southern California, where twenty-six new organizations were established.

## EXPANSION

Early expansion of a fraternity or sorority could occur in several ways. The first involved personal contact. If one individual was aggressive in spreading the word about his or her organization, that could have a significant impact on its growth. For example, Otis Glazebrook, one of the founders of Alpha Tau Omega at Virginia Military Institute, was responsible for establishing chapters at five other colleges. When fraternity members traveled to different colleges for personal or school business, they often advertised for individuals who were interested in establishing chapters. Summer vacation was another vehicle for expansion. When students returned home for the break, they would see their old friends and others who attended different schools, expound on the virtues of their fraternities or sororities, and get their friends interested and involved. After returning to their respective schools, these individuals might establish new chapters. A third aspect of personal contact involved fraternity or sorority members who transferred to other colleges or who graduated and went on to law or medical school. These students often established chapters at their new schools, if they did not already exist. Another strategy to gain members was to "lift" individuals—in other words, to steal them from another fraternity.[31]

A second process of expansion involved the several types of local organizations found on college campuses, such as fraternities, sororities, clubs, and literary societies. In one approach, local groups organized with the specific intention of joining a national organization. Once the local organization built up its qualifications, it would apply for membership in a national fraternity or sorority. In a second approach, the national organization would solicit well-established local organizations to become chapters of that fraternity or sorority. The records of many national fraternities and sororities identify numerous chapters that at one time were local organizations.[32]

Today, the method of expansion is called colonization. Usually, the national organization identifies a specific college where it wishes to establish a

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chapter and sends representatives to the college to recruit members. A second, less common approach involves the process discussed in the previous paragraph, whereby a local organization becomes a chapter of a national organization. In either case, the chapter is referred to as a colony and is given probationary status before being fully recognized as a chapter. Both white fraternities and sororities and BGLOs use these processes of expansion in one form or another.[33]

The expansion of fraternities and sororities can be discussed in terms of adoption and augmentation. Adoption refers to the first time a fraternity or sorority is established at a college or university. Augmentation refers to the adding of chapters at that particular campus. Both processes illustrate the expansion of this institution, the first by adding more colleges and universities to the list of those with fraternities and sororities, and the second by enlarging the fraternity system on individual campuses.[34]

*The Early Years.* Expansion of the first two fraternities—Phi Beta Kappa and Kappa Alpha—is not fully documented. Extant records indicate that chapters of Phi Beta Kappa existed at five schools—William and Mary (1776), Yale (1780), Harvard (1781), Dartmouth (1787), and Union (1817)—and Kappa Alpha existed at one—North Carolina (1812). Prior to 1830, only one school had increased its number of fraternities; that was Union College, with its triad of Kappa Alpha Society (1825), Sigma Phi (1827), and Delta Phi (1827).

Besides being an early adopter, Union College was the place of origin of six national fraternities, four of them prior to 1840. Union has a unique place in the annals of fraternal history. One explanation for its importance seems to be its curriculum. While most colleges were offering classical courses, Union had expanded the curriculum to include many nontraditional courses. Considered a radical, Union president Eliphalet Nott steered the curriculum away from the classics to include science, engineering, and modern literature; he also accepted students who had been expelled from other colleges. Perhaps another reason for the number of fraternities at this school was that, unlike many other presidents, who tried to eliminate these organizations, Nott regarded membership in fraternities as an appropriate student activity.[35]

In the 1820s and 1830s, the majority of schools adopting fraternities were located in New England and New York State. Only two schools did so during the 1820s, Princeton (1824) in New Jersey and Bowdoin (1825) in Maine. The chapter at Bowdoin was Phi Beta Kappa, and the chapter at Princeton was a local fraternity, Chi Phi Society. This organization became defunct but was

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later reestablished and remains active today. Of the eight adopting schools in the 1830s, only the Universities of Georgia and Miami (Ohio) were outside the "Cradle of Social Fraternities." In 1832, Alpha Delta Phi was organized at Hamilton, and in 1833, it established a chapter at Miami (Ohio), the first chapter of any fraternity west of the Appalachian Mountains. Six years later, dissension arose, and eight members withdrew and formed a new fraternity—Beta Theta Pi. Together with Phi Delta Theta (1848) and Sigma Chi (1855), these three came to be known collectively as the "Miami Triad."[36]

During the 1830s, five new fraternities were established, bringing the total to nine. Williams and New York University led the way with three new chapters; Yale, Union, Hamilton, Brown, and Miami (Ohio) each had two. Expansion remained more or less confined to eastern New York and southern New England. The leading organizations in expansion included Alpha Delta Phi with eight chapters and Sigma Phi with four chapters. Half the Alpha Delta Phi chapters were at schools adopting the fraternity for the first time.[37]

As a fraternity made the transition from a local to a national organization, a system for naming chapters had to be devised. One method was to name the first chapter Alpha for the first Greek letter, the second chapter Beta for the second Greek letter, and so forth. Once the entire alphabet had been used, the next series of chapters would be called Alpha Alpha, Alpha Beta, and so on. A second method referred to the first chapter in each state as Alpha, the second as Beta, and so forth. A third method of identification used Greek letters as initials for certain words in the school's motto. Most BGLOs utilized the first approach in naming their chapters.[38]

Generally, faculty members were opposed to fraternities during this period. Most had been trained for the ministry, and as students, they had enjoyed few freedoms or responsibilities. They believed that their students should also have to conform. Thus, school administrators and faculty kept a close watch on fraternities, and many colleges banned them altogether. As a result, many chapters went underground and became even more secretive. Members of one chapter, for example, rented the first floor of a dormitory, cut a trap door, and dug out a basement in order to have a secret place to meet. Activities such as this did not enhance the image of the fraternity. Some smaller colleges, however, refused to oppose fraternities because they helped attract students.[39]

*Entrenchment.* By 1840, eleven national fraternities had been established, although two were no longer active. During the 1840s, ten new fraternities were founded, bringing the total to nineteen active ones. Four of these established

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only the parent chapter, while the other six added two or more new chapters. The nine continuing organizations also expanded. For Beta Theta Pi, nearly two-thirds of its chapters were established at schools that previously did not have any fraternities. The same is true for Phi Delta Theta, which established 80 percent of its chapters during the 1850s at first-time adopting schools. Considering the relative newness of the institution and the small number of fraternities, the adoption numbers for these early years were quite impressive.[40]

The number of schools adopting fraternities more than doubled from the 1830s to the 1840s and again from the 1840s to the 1850s. Nearly two-thirds of fraternity expansion during these two decades occurred at first-time adopting institutions. The 1850s saw sixteen new fraternities, two of them female organizations that later became Greek-letter sororities. With the reactivation of Chi Phi Society at Princeton, the number of active fraternities and sororities grew to thirty-six, all of which established new chapters during this decade; 202 new chapters were established at eighty-seven schools, and two-thirds of these schools were first-time adopters. During the 1850s, expansion shifted to the South, although New England and the Mid-Atlantic states were still important.[41]

Prior to the Civil War, the role of a founding chapter was like that of a parent. Although most fraternities intended to expand, problems arose because of an inadequate system to administer a national organization. Parent chapters had difficulty controlling other chapters. In several instances, a chapter of one national organization switched to a different national organization, sometimes by surrendering its original charter, and sometimes by being "lifted" by the second organization, without the first's consent.[42]

The onset of the Civil War saw the adoption process slow considerably. The war disrupted many aspects of U.S. society, including universities and colleges. It also devastated the fraternity in two ways. First, students left college to fight in the war; sometimes an entire chapter would enlist at the same time. Second, fraternity membership naturally declined as college enrollment declined. Many schools nearly ceased to function as their campus buildings were used for barracks, hospitals, and ammunition depots. Many southern colleges suffered damage and took several years to rebuild, and several northern schools closed. One such school, Phi Kappa Sigma Male College (Arkansas), the only example of a college named for a fraternity, was used to store supplies for the Confederacy and was later destroyed by the Union army. It is estimated that 80 percent of chapter losses during the 1860s were a result of the war. There were, however, five new fraternities established, four in the North and one in the South. Of the twenty-seven schools adopting fraternities during the 1860s,

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seven did so during the Civil War, and three of them were in the South. Adoption, however, went forward more quickly in the North, and for the first time, a western school adopted a fraternity when five chapters were established at California–Berkeley.[43]

During the Civil War, many fraternities became inactive, especially in the South. Afterward, the northern fraternities that had had chapters in the South were reluctant to reestablish them. This created a void for southern students that resulted in the creation of a number of new fraternities. The first was Alpha Tau Omega (1865) at Virginia Military Institute, followed by Kappa Sigma Kappa (1867) and Sigma Nu (1869). At the University of Virginia, Pi Kappa Alpha (1868) and Kappa Sigma (1869) were established; at Washington and Lee (Virginia), Kappa Alpha Order (1865) was founded; and at Cumberland College (Tennessee), Alpha Gamma (1867) was created. All but the last school is part of the "Virginia Circle." These new organizations emerged from the conflict trying to "keep alive the spirit of chivalry, self-sacrifice, mutual helpfulness, and comradeship born of their recent experiences." Another goal seemed to be to preserve various aspects of their southern culture. Several organizations used military titles for their officers. Despite the Civil War, which slowed new chapter growth, fifty-three chapters were established during the decade, with nearly 70 percent of this growth from 1865 to 1870. Almost half of these new chapters were in the South. During this decade, thirteen new fraternities were established, eight of them after 1865. By 1870, then, forty-nine college fraternities had been established; however, many went defunct during the Civil War.[44]

Beginning in the 1870s, major changes in the college curriculum and student life took place. Led by the president of Harvard and embraced by his fellow educators, an attitude of self-independence spread around the country. Among other things, a degree of freedom emerged whereby students could choose their own course of study. This, in turn, "fostered the development of a system of free and competitive enterprises in student affairs." During this decade, six fraternities and six sororities were established. Expansion involved forty fraternities and sororities, with 270 new chapters at 126 schools. Regional expansion was still focused on Virginia, with nearly 30 new chapters established.[45]

During the 1880s, the ratio of fraternity chapters to nonmember students was 1:107; a comparative number was 1:580 in 1980. In other words, for every chapter there were 107 non-Greek college students, indicating a high degree of Greek involvement during this decade. Although student enrollments increased

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by nearly 30 percent, enrollments in fraternities and sororities were at 36 percent. In the 1880s, only two new fraternities and three new sororities were founded, all from 1885 to 1889. In the 1890s, eighteen new organizations were established, the same number as had been founded in the previous two decades combined. Again, half were sororities. More fraternities and sororities were establishing new chapters, but the number of chapters per fraternity or sorority declined. All this occurred at fewer colleges, as the number of adopting schools decreased from the previous decade.[46]

Part of the reason for the decline between the late 1870s and late 1880s might have been an antifraternity movement that swept college campuses. Undoubtedly, it was prompted by the 1874 publication of a book that attacked fraternities for their immorality and selectivity in membership. From 1875 to 1890, 191 chapters went inactive. Roughly 50 percent of these chapter losses occurred in schools imposing antifraternity regulations. For example, on many campuses, incoming students were required to take a pledge that they would not belong to any fraternity. Purdue University lost a court case when a transfer student, who already belonged to a fraternity, refused to sign such an oath. Fraternities and schools were soon involved in many court cases concerning a student's right to join a fraternity. With this antifraternity regulation, administrators hoped that fraternities and sororities would be eliminated by attrition at their schools. Many chapters, however, went underground, a practice that was not always supported by the national organization of that fraternity or sorority. As a result, many charters were withdrawn. Charters could also be withdrawn for insubordination or low academic standards. During this time, around 22 percent of chapter losses were the result of the withdrawal of their charters.[47]

Populism took its toll during the 1890s and the first decade of the 1900s. Fraternities came under attack for being exclusive and undemocratic and for fostering debauchery. During this time, the Populist Party influenced the passage of state laws that either banned the fraternity system or reduced its activities at state institutions. For example, the University of South Carolina (1897), University of Arkansas (1901), and University of Mississippi (1912) passed laws prohibiting fraternities and sororities at these state schools. Seven chapters at South Carolina and six at Mississippi were forced to suspend activities. In Arkansas, however, it was ruled that although the intent of the law was to exclude these organizations, the act actually stated that no fraternity member should receive an honor or class distinction from the university. Thus, members at the University of Arkansas opted to forgo any such honors, and the fraternities and sororities continued to exist. Between 1912 and 1916, legisla-

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tures in Texas, Ohio, Wisconsin, Kansas, California, and Missouri also attempted to abolish fraternities and sororities at state institutions. In all these states, however, the proposed legislation was defeated. These examples reflect the degree of bitterness many college administrations and many Americans felt toward college fraternities.[48]

The leading organizations in establishing chapters at first-time adopting schools between 1840 and 1900 included Beta Theta Pi, with twenty-six chapters; Delta Tau Delta and Sigma Alpha Epsilon, with fifteen each; Phi Delta Theta, with thirteen chapters; and Alpha Tau Omega with twelve. Of the organizations establishing new chapters during this period, Phi Delta Theta and Sigma Alpha Epsilon led with eighty-four and eighty-two chapters, respectively. Beta Theta Pi, Sigma Chi, and Alpha Tau Omega all established seventy-three chapters. Much of this expansion took place from 1860 to 1890.[49]

This entrenchment phase was one of contrasts. Although growth occurred, the fraternity system was greatly affected by the Civil War, faculty opposition, and the antifraternity regulations of the 1870s and 1880s. Overall, the Civil War was the most damaging, though antifraternity regulations had an impact on individual campuses. However, the proliferation of colleges during the latter part of the nineteenth century greatly increased the possibilities for expansion. Numerous denominational colleges, land grant schools, and women's and coeducational colleges, as well as private schools, offered potential homes for fraternities and sororities. Some organizations established chapters in local communities or at high schools, although these did not survive long. Between 1870 and 1920, 478 new colleges were established around the United States. As students filled these new institutions, many were eager to duplicate the college life experience of older institutions. As a result, fraternities and sororities greatly benefited.[50]

*National Expansion.* By 1900, students attended college for a variety of reasons. Prior to this time, the major reason for attending college was to prepare for the ministry, the law, or one of the other traditional professions. Now, many attended college to better their economic status. Attending college became "the thing to do," with prestige accorded to those who had graduated. As part of the college experience, one became a member of a fraternity or sorority.[51]

During this period, great expansion took place. One notable reason for the rapid growth of fraternities and sororities had to do with student housing. By the end of the nineteenth century, student dormitories were losing money and were being discontinued at many colleges, and fraternities and sororities

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stepped in to fill this void. Thus, the need for student housing became the primary reason for the dramatic increase in membership. Colleges were eager to help fraternities and sororities construct chapter houses, for it helped solve their housing problems and relieved school administrators of the responsibility of watching over students. The rapid increase in new chapters verified that the fraternity system was needed to handle a situation that colleges could not or would not address.[52]

From 1900 to 1930, 24 percent of the schools that added fraternities or sororities to their campuses were first-time adopters. Of the top eleven fraternities and sororities to establish chapters at adopting schools, three were black organizations and six were sororities, indicating the increased enrollment of women and blacks at institutions of higher learning. The leading fraternity in establishing chapters at adopting schools was a BGLO, Phi Beta Sigma, established in 1914. Alpha Phi Alpha, the first BGLO established in 1906, was tied for fourth with Omega Psi Phi, established in 1911, along with two white sororities. Because these were recent organizations, the opportunity to establish new chapters was widely available. Of the top six leaders in expansion, five were sororities. Chi Omega led with eighty-two chapters; Kappa Delta had seventy-five chapters; Delta Zeta had seventy-two chapters; Delta Delta Delta and Zeta Tau Alpha each had sixty-four new chapters; and Lambda Chi Alpha, the only fraternity, had seventy-six new chapters.[53]

The early editions of *Baird's Manual* classified fraternities as either northern or southern based on their place of origin. As the Greek-letter system expanded, however, classification was done on a regional basis. By 1900, regional boundaries were largely irrelevant, because continued expansion meant that chapters of a fraternity or sorority existed in numerous regions or even throughout the country. During this time, some of the fraternities and sororities began to map the schools where they were located to create target areas for possible expansion. From 1910 to 1919, growth continued as 26 new fraternities and 10 new sororities were established. The number of new chapters nearly doubled to 940. There were now 114 fraternities and sororities involved in expansion.[54]

The economic prosperity of the 1920s contributed to a rapid increase in college enrollment and a similar rise in fraternity membership. From 1920 to 1925, there were 21 new fraternities and 5 new sororities established. With 134 fraternities and sororities creating 1,802 new chapters at 309 schools, the 1920s was a decade of growth and expansion unequaled in the annals of fraternity history until the 1970s. Approximately 75 percent of the new chapters were at schools that already had such organizations. Amidst this growth, two national

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associations were formed to serve as umbrella organizations. The initial suggestion for such an organization had been made in 1883 and again in 1893, but it was not until 1909 that the National Interfraternity Conference (NIC) was established, the umbrella organization for most of the white national fraternities. The NIC was not the first umbrella organization, for sororities had organized the National Panhellenic Conference in 1902, after earlier attempts in 1891 and 1893 had failed. The black national fraternities and sororities were excluded, and in 1929, these groups organized the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) to meet their needs.[55]

### DIVERSIFICATION

During the early history of the fraternity, the typical college student was male, white, and Protestant and from a high economic class; fraternities reflected that homogeneity. The creation of new fraternities was often an attempt by students to improve on existing organizations, and many groups sought to get away from social status or wealth as a condition for membership. In addition, the secretive nature of early fraternities alienated many college students. In response, these students established "equitable" fraternities, or organizations that were not secret. Some of the early ones were the Equitable Society (1834) at Williams, Union Equitable (1837) at Union, and the Social Fraternity (1847) at Hamilton. In 1847, these local fraternities formed the nucleus of the Anti-Secret Confederation, the precursor of Delta Upsilon (1864), a national organization today.[56]

It was during the second wave of establishment (1885–1929) that student populations on college campuses diversified to include ethnic minorities, blacks, and Jews, resulting in many different types of fraternities. There was also an explosion of new sororities for women in response to this diversification. Conversely, many of the older fraternities reacted by implementing exclusionary clauses, limiting membership to white, male, Protestant students to ensure a homogeneous group of individuals of like mind, religion, and race. If the fraternity was to be a brotherhood, it was argued, how could a white Protestant male be compatible with somebody from a different religion or race? Thus, by 1928, more than half the national fraternities had membership rules based on race or religion. Those who condoned such restrictive clauses pointed to society's organizations, with their various rules and restrictions. In response to these restrictions, nonsecret and nonsectarian fraternities were organized. In 1899, the National Federation of Common Clubs was established at Wesleyan,

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a loosely knit national organization consisting of nonsecret organizations. At its national meeting in 1918, the idea of a fraternity was proposed, and Phi Mu Delta was organized.[57]

Many thought that members of a true brotherhood should come from different religions and races. Thus, nonsectarian and interracial fraternities were created. The first nonsectarian fraternity, Pi Lambda Phi (1895), was established at Yale as a protest against fraternities that excluded Jews. Despite the inclusion of non-Jews, the fraternity remained predominantly Jewish until after World War II. Other nonsectarian fraternities included Delta Sigma Phi (1895), Phi Epsilon Pi (1904), Kappa Delta Rho (1905), Alpha Phi Delta (1914), and Sigma Lambda Pi (1915). Although officially nonsectarian, many of these groups consisted mainly of Jewish students. Omega Pi Alpha (1901) was organized as an interracial fraternity but was not very successful. In 1948, Beta Sigma Tau was another effort to be both interreligious and interracial.[58]

As the enrollment of students from different religious backgrounds increased, many banded together to form fraternities. Many early fraternities made reference to Christian principles or to a supreme being; however, around the turn of the twentieth century, a couple of organizations implemented ideals and rituals based on the specific teachings of Jesus Christ. Two of these were Alpha Chi Rho (1895) at Trinity College (Connecticut) and Alpha Kappa Lambda (1907) at California–Berkeley. Catholic students, who were excluded from many fraternities, organized three: Phi Kappa (1889) at Brown (Rhode Island), Theta Kappa Phi (1919) at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania, and Alpha Delta Gamma (1924) at Loyola University in Chicago. The first two organizations merged in 1959 to form Phi Kappa Theta. Other fraternities established by religious groups included Delta Phi Kappa (1920) at Utah for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon) and Beta Sigma Psi (1925) for Lutheran students at Illinois.

Other fraternities were modeled on the many fraternal organizations in the United States. Acacia (1904) was based on the principles of Freemasonry, and membership was restricted to Masons. Square and Compass (1917) and Sigma Mu Sigma (1931) were two other fraternities based on this fraternal order. Similar organizations included Delta Sigma Lambda (1921), whose members had to be in the Order of De Molay, and Phi Lambda Theta (1920), which was organized for students who belonged to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.[59]

The greatest number of fraternities and sororities established between 1895 and 1920 were for Jewish students, who were attending college in increasing

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numbers and were excluded from the Protestant fraternities. Jewish students organized some fourteen fraternities and five sororities. The first national Jewish fraternity was Zeta Beta Tau (1903), established at the City University of New York; its beginnings can be traced to a Zionist study group that met at the Jewish Theological Seminary as early as 1898. When members of this group went to various colleges, chapters were established. The majority of Jewish fraternities and sororities were established between 1900 and 1909, with most of them located in New York, reflecting that state's large Jewish population. The City University of New York led the way with four organizations; New York University, Cornell, and Columbia each had three.[60]

Other ethnic organizations included a Chinese fraternity, Rho Psi (1916), established at Cornell and a Spanish American fraternity, Sigma Iota (1904), established at Louisiana State University. The latter organization joined with Phi Lambda Alpha, from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, to form Phi Iota Alpha in 1931. Fraternities and sororities also expanded to other countries. In 1867, a chapter of Chi Phi was established at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, but it survived only three years. In 1879, Zeta Psi established a chapter at the University of Toronto in Canada. Today, many national organizations have chapters in Canada, and a Canadian fraternity, Phi Kappa Pi, was established in 1913.[61]

This proliferation of fraternal organizations based on specific religions, races, or nationalities enabled fraternities and sororities to include all types of students and to expand to new campuses. This expansion was, for the most part, locked into the various segregated institutions—Catholic fraternities at Catholic schools, and black fraternities and sororities at black schools. This changed as enrollment increased and student bodies became more diversified. When many of these individuals found themselves excluded from joining established fraternal and sororal organizations, they sought to establish like organizations for their own religious, ethnic, or ideological groups.[62]

## Black Greek-Letter Organizations

With the propagation of various fraternities and sororities during the second wave, it was only natural that black students formed their own fraternal and sororal organizations. Between the Civil War and the early 1900s, numerous colleges were established specifically for blacks. Like many of the early American colleges, these institutions experienced struggles between students and

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faculty over the curriculum and who should be in control of student college life. These conflicts came to a head during the 1920s. In the northern cities, middle-class blacks had been attending institutions of higher learning for several generations, but they were still discriminated against in many ways. Many white colleges simply refused to enroll blacks, and where blacks were admitted, they constituted a very small percentage of the student body. In 1927, only 1,500 black students attended predominantly white colleges, and 13,680 attended black colleges and universities.[63]

Discrimination was found at all levels. At one college, students were required to pass a swim test in order to graduate, but blacks were barred from using the university's swimming pool. In athletics, blacks and whites were not permitted to come into physical contact. This discrimination also had a profound impact on the social lives of black students. Simply put, blacks were banned from joining the various clubs, societies, and fraternities and sororities. For the most part, college institutions did nothing to encourage the socialization of their black students, and white students did what they could to exclude their black fellow students from college life. As one society man said, "the presence of a colored man in our ranks would for many of us spoil utterly the social side of society life. . . . Few of us would have been able to give him the glad hand of fellowship and social equality which would have been his due if admitted." In order to socialize and associate with one another, black students had to form their own clubs, societies, and fraternities and sororities.[64]

Why did the first BGLO not originate on a black college campus? Since the student body at black colleges was homogeneous, the various clubs and student organizations at these schools provided the necessary social interaction for students. However, like other institutions of higher education at the time, black colleges imposed strict discipline on their students. Thus, it was only a matter of time before fraternities and sororities would appear at black colleges. As a minority on white college campuses, however, black students' ability to socialize was limited. Within a black fraternity or sorority, students found a "support system" to help them socialize and survive at an institution dominated by white students.

The first national collegiate BGLO, Alpha Phi Alpha, was established at Cornell University in 1906.[65] At Cornell, several black students organized the Social Study Club; although its members stressed the importance of doing well in their courses, they were also interested "in the struggles against segregation, discrimination, prejudice, mistreatment, and the advancement of themselves and their people, and in supplying an adequate leadership for them."

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Later BGLOs would have similar statements of purpose. Several of the black students at Cornell were working their way through college and obtained jobs in white fraternity houses on campus. In this capacity, they observed the ideals of the fraternity and desired to form a similar type of organization for blacks. They also learned "what not to do and what to do" as a fraternity.[66]

As Henry Callis, one of the original founders of the Social Study Club, recalled:

> Talks with the colored residents of the town especially those who had worked or were working in the white fraternity houses at the time were more encouraging. They gave us the necessary moral support by telling us that the colored boys should have similar organizations like the white boys. They even offered us financial aid and stated that we could use their homes whenever we wanted them for our meetings. The idea that the Negro boys of Cornell were going to organize a fraternity spread like a prairie fire, and many offers of financial aid and other aid were offered us. We thanked them and told them that we would not turn down their assistance but would hold them in abeyance until some future date because we wanted to be sure of our name, and until such time we would work in secret.[67]

The second recognized black fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi, was established at Indiana University in 1911 by a group of ten black students, the only ones on campus. In 1922, a sorority, Sigma Gamma Rho, was established at Butler University (Indiana), at that time a teachers college. However, Howard University, a black college established in 1867 in Washington, D.C., can be called the cradle of BGLOs. From 1908 to 1920, five national organizations were established at this school, as well as the fraternity Gamma Tau (1934), which is now defunct. These national organizations consisted of two fraternities, Omega Psi Phi (1911) and Phi Beta Sigma (1914), and three sororities, Alpha Kappa Alpha (1908), Delta Sigma Theta (1913), and Zeta Phi Beta (1920). Iota Phi Theta was established at Morgan State University (Maryland) in 1963. These nine organizations are recognized as the "Divine Nine" and constitute the NPHC.[68]

During the second wave of establishment, then, a separate Greek system emerged for BGLOs. This system operated differently from the traditional white Greek system, as prospective BGLO members were required to have completed some college credits and have a solid grade point average before being accepted into an organization. With time, these early BGLOs were able to select mem-

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bers from a pool of applicants who had grown up desiring to belong to a fraternity or sorority.[69]

Between the second and third waves of establishment (1930–1974), at least five national organizations were established. Gamma Tau and Iota Phi Theta have already been mentioned, with the latter being the only BGLO established after 1929 to become a member of the NPHC (in 1996). The remaining organizations included Groove Phi Groove (1962), established at Morgan State (Maryland); its sister sorority, Swing Phi Swing (1969), established at Winston-Salem State University (North Carolina); and Phi Eta Psi (1965), established at Mott Community College (Michigan). Thus begins to emerge a divide between the BGLOs of the old guard, the "Divine Nine," and other black organizations established since the 1960s.[70]

The third wave (1975–1999) is characterized by a number of BGLOs that took a variety of conventional and unconventional approaches. Actually beginning in the 1960s, several of these unconventional groups were a "parody of mainstream Greek-letter organizations," espoused the ideology of Black Power, or emphasized African fraternalism, which suggested that Western culture was nothing but a copy of African culture. By the mid-1980s, a number of conventional black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities had been established that could be identified as individualistic, multicultural, or religious. They were individualistic because their founders desired to leave a legacy, multicultural because many welcomed individuals from all cultural groups, and religious because their principles focused on Jesus Christ. These groups desired the social interaction of traditional fraternities or sororities but not the culture associated with these organizations.[71]

The emergence of the first intercollegiate BGLO in 1906, along with the addition of other Greek-letter organizations specifically for blacks, filled a niche in the college experience for this segment of the student body. As BGLOs established chapters throughout the country, these groups still had to contend with discrimination. For the most part, white national fraternities and sororities refused to recognize BGLOs. For example, at Colorado Teachers College, a cup was awarded each year to the sorority with the highest grade point average. When a black sorority achieved this distinction, the Greek council refused to give out the award and instead abolished it.[72]

The early history of the college fraternal system lays the groundwork for the rise of various fraternities and sororities and the BGLOs. Although all fraternities and sororities struggled with acceptance at college institutions, BGLOs had to overcome the added burden of discrimination—discrimination from

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the predominantly white institutions of higher education, from other students, and from white fraternities and sororities. Despite these difficulties, BGLOs have flourished on college campuses. Like their white counterparts, BGLOs provide students with the opportunity to socialize and participate in a brotherhood or sisterhood.

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Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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lished at Wilberforce University (Ohio) and became a national organization when it established at least three chapters, before dying out around 1947. Walter M. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 29–30.

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# 3

## Black Fraternal and Benevolent Societies in Nineteenth-Century America

*Anne S. Butler*

According to Monroe Work, editor of *The Negro Year Book,* black fraternal groups can be divided into two classes: benevolent societies and old-line, secret societies such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Elks.[1] Clearly delineating between the two classes is difficult, because both engaged in similar activities. However, benevolent societies (sometimes called benefit societies) offered open and mixed-gender memberships, had no secret rituals, and organized primarily to provide mutual aid and uplift activities at the community level. Along with fraternal groups, benevolent societies often provided substantial financial aid to members. In contrast, fraternal orders generally had restrictive memberships (male only) and were framed around secret rituals. Although benevolent societies existed in many different states and sometimes under similar names, another way in which these societies differed from fraternal orders was the absence of a structure for uniting local, district, or national bodies.

Apart from churches, fraternal and benevolent societies have long been the largest and most durable organizations in black communities. The founders and leaders of these organizations were in the vanguard of social change and made significant contributions to the widespread liberation, political, moral, temperance, and social reform movements that characterized the nineteenth-century United States. The fraternal and benevolent societies they created, along with churches, became the center of black life, and their impact lasted throughout most of the next two centuries.

This chapter traces the desires and efforts of the founding leaders of these organizations to build community. It illuminates an often unacknowledged yet profound sense of agency, and positive race consciousness, on the part of these leaders. This consciousness propelled the relatively few free blacks starting these societies to create and do for one another what they could not expect from the larger society. Moreover, their visions for racial uplift transcended



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their individual organizations and provided a template for the cadre of black college students who founded intercollegiate fraternities and sororities at the turn of the twentieth century.

## Racialization of the American Republic

Black fraternal and benevolent societies originated within the historical context of the racialization of the new American Republic. These organizations were designed in response to social and political conditions of oppression experienced by people who were formerly enslaved. Initially, the organizing efforts were led by those who were anxious to break the physical bonds of enslavement. The need to negotiate for and defend their rights as newly freed people was great, as restrictions on free blacks were common during the late eighteenth century. Many states required free people to carry passes, or certificates, that proved their emancipation; failure to do so could lead to re-enslavement. Thus, the status of *free* people was continually threatened by new laws and restrictions. In essence, their freedom was nominal, for they were without the tangible benefits of full citizenship. In actuality, their status as *free* men and women merely relegated them to the shadows of race and class—color and caste—codified by a system of permanent enslavement.[2]

According to historian John Hope Franklin, "race was a powerful factor in the establishment of the system of slavery, and for two and a half centuries, race was crucial to the maintenance of the institution."[3] The system of enslavement was designed to place an indelible stamp of inferiority on those enslaved. Additionally, the system arranged social, political, and economic structures to maintain their subordination into perpetuity. Laws were enacted to propagate the system's transmission through heritage. Slavery defined a whole race of people, attributing to them negative and pejorative images and characteristics that remain today. Along with their enslavement, brutalizing attempts were made to erase any positive memories of their country of origin. Systematic attempts were made to alter their memories of ancestral spiritual values, as well as values that conveyed a sense of social relationship and responsibility to one another.

It was against this racialized backdrop that benevolent societies and fraternal orders emerged. Of particular significance to the founding of the first fraternal organization, the African Free and Accepted Masons, is the manner in which its origin parallels the American Revolution. It was during this time

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that the ideals of liberty and democracy were in full bloom. These were considered natural rights—the inalienable rights of man. But essentially, only white men's rights were covered. Therefore, free blacks received a wake-up call during the period surrounding the American Revolution. Whatever hopes they held for full citizenship were largely renounced by the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as both documents were designed to exclude blacks permanently from both the country's governance structure and the opportunity to improve their quality of life. Reinforcing the stance of these documents were other overt actions throughout the nineteenth century. From the time that slavery ended with the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment following the Civil War, the quest for full citizenship required black people to engage in a prolonged period of struggle to acquire the rights promised by the country's founding documents.

More than 100 fraternal and benevolent organizations were documented during the nineteenth century. Many were national in scope, and dozens of others were active at the local level but lacked continuity and persistence. They had a membership of nearly 7,400.[4] Benevolent and fraternal organizations grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century in both urban and rural areas all over the country, in part because they provided material support and in part because they provided a sense of hope and spiritual nourishment. Large numbers of disenfranchised blacks were seeking freedom and improved standards of living both before and after the Civil War. Benevolent and fraternal societies provided displaced people with the basic needs of shelter, food, and clothing. At another level, these societies helped with relocation activities and schooling and employment opportunities; they also connected formerly enslaved people with established members of the community who could help locate family members displaced by slavery. Members of both types of societies made small but regular payments to establish funds for charitable causes, and such benefits were allotted to members during times of sickness or death. The need for these self-help initiatives was critical due to the precarious economic conditions most blacks faced throughout the century.

## Benevolent Societies

Prior to emancipation, purely benevolent societies took one of two forms: either public and visible or private and invisible.[5] Organizations directed by free people of color could afford a certain degree of visibility, but those operating

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within the confines of the slave system necessarily existed underground. Owners of enslaved people were fearful of the secret societies, yet they were less concerned about the organized efforts of free blacks to build churches and, in some cases, schools. Clandestine meetings and ceremonies, secret signs and rituals, and special uniforms with symbols and regalia that whites could not interpret sounded an alarm. It was assumed, and rightly so, that free people of color represented a threat to the deeply entrenched system of enslavement. Following emancipation, the advent of Jim Crow codes and regulations challenged the freedoms acquired by the abolition of slavery and represented an enduring assault against the civic, economic, and social inclusion of blacks. It took nearly a century to dismantle the power, and restrictive nature, of the most blatant Jim Crow practices. Largely for these reasons, the development of voluntary benevolent and mutual aid uplift societies increased throughout the nineteenth century among all sectors of the black population.

The practice of establishing cemeteries for members and their families was a key feature of benevolent societies in the southern states, where the need for appropriate and dignified burial sites and money for funeral expenses was pronounced. Roberta Hughes Wright and Wilbur Hughes note that burial societies' "importance to black communities stems from the belief that the soul of a black would eventually return to the mother continent—but only if the body was given a proper and respectful send off." In addition, "ceremony was a fundamental component of the burial aid societies' organization."[6] Benevolent societies also served as social centers for members, and some were "purely social."[7] Class differences sometimes resulted in social rivalries among and between the members of these societies.

John Hope Franklin reaffirms the importance of establishing benevolent or benefit societies based on economic concerns: "Even before the turn of the [nineteenth] century there were unmistakable evidences of profound economic and social changes taking place on the American scene." Historical patterns based on market supply and demand were in transition. According to Franklin, "a logical outcome of benevolent and mutual aid societies was the extension of insurance companies,"[8] which were economic rather than social or political ventures. For example, the Black North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company, the Atlanta Mutual Life Insurance Company, and the National Benefit Life Insurance Company all were outgrowths of members pooling their money together in benevolent and mutual aid societies.

Several benevolent societies emerged over time; some of the more prominent ones are discussed below.

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## FREE AFRICAN SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

Richard Allen and Absalom Jones established the Free African Society of Philadelphia on April 17, 1787, as an organization for mutual aid and racial uplift.[9] Further, the organization provided the means and a structure for members to support one another in sickness and death and to assist widows and fatherless children. Allen and Jones and their followers were active during the American Revolution. They learned well the lessons of independence evidenced through the Revolution. Given the context of the times (i.e., independence from Britain and unresolved issues of slavery), the leaders of the Free African Society were preparing an agenda to secure their own independence and that of their extended community. For instance, during the yellow fever epidemic that hit the city of Philadelphia in 1793, members of the Free African Society were organized by Allen and Jones to render service to the larger community. Members provided relief functions throughout the city, serving as nurses and undertakers. Benjamin Brawley underscores the significance of these humanitarian efforts by noting, "a determining factor in the Negro's social progress was the service that he was able to render to any community in which he found himself, as well as to his own people."[10] These leaders believed in a universal sense of community and engaged in humanitarian acts that went beyond their primary group. On a regular basis, the leaders of the Free African Society advocated the creation of similar societies among free Africans throughout the New England area and beyond.

Given that the aims of the Free African Society were consistent with those of churches, and given that both Allen and Jones were ministers, although of different denominations, the Free African Society of Philadelphia eventually engaged in the business of establishing churches. In 1794, both founders established churches in Philadelphia. Their churches integrated soul saving with practical steps for improving the quality of the physical and material lives of their members. Jones opened the first black Episcopal church, St. Thomas Protestant Episcopal, and Allen founded the mother of all African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches, Bethel AME. Allen's work in the early independence movements earned him the dual titles "Apostle of Freedom" and "Father of the Negro." His biographer, Charles Wesley, notes, "his career shows that the acceptance of inferiority and the spirit of submission are not racial characteristics. He was courageous and was ready to fight for principles at all times."[11] The Free African Society that Allen cofounded served as a moral custodian and encouraged recently emancipated people to legiti-

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mize marriages formed under the customs of slavery. Moral instruction included adopting temperance reforms and refraining from other debilitating vices.

### AFRICAN UNION SOCIETY

The next major benevolent society in the New England area was formed in 1787 when free blacks in Rhode Island organized the African Union Society. Among the slave trading colonies, Newport ranked second as a major center for "trafficking" in enslaved people.[12] One of the African Union Society leaders was Paul Cuffe, a wealthy free black man who became famous as a shipping merchant, philanthropist, and colonizer. He proposed a different solution for the problems confronting his people, becoming one of the first black leaders to seriously consider and then activate a plan for Africans to return to their country of origin. In connection with this work, Cuffe founded the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone in 1815 (five years before the American Colonization Society was founded). Cuffe died two years later, before his plan was fully implemented, but he had managed to resettle thirty-eight freed people in Liberia with his own resources. Cuffe's efforts reveal another level of the struggle, a shift in the strategy for racial uplift, and the first steps toward the creation of a policy for emigration. Cuffe's strategy affirmed that with real freedom as the goal, some African people were indeed interested in leaving America for other lands.

### BROWN FELLOWSHIP SOCIETY

A collective focus on external forces was not enough to insulate benevolent societies from internal conflicts and divisions along gender, caste, and class lines. One such internal conflict was based on complexion. According to scholars Robert Harris and Ira Berlin, the Brown Fellowship Society, which originated in Charleston during the 1790s, was open primarily to free, wealthy, light-complexioned men of color.[13] Its purpose was similar to that of most benevolent societies, except that a light complexion was a criterion for membership and became a symbol of exclusiveness. This color paradigm created conflict within the group and was an outgrowth of a deliberate hierarchical scheme based on color and caste imposed by slave owners. Slave owners believed that they could mandate a certain amount of conformity by offering limited privileges to light-complexioned people that were denied to those with dark complexions. This

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stratification of the black population along color lines placed light-complexioned free persons somewhere between the enslaved population and the white planter class. When color consciousness pervaded the ranks of fraternal and benevolent societies, the result was often internal conflict and division that they could ill afford. This mentality was counterproductive and against their purported aims of racial unity and uplift.

### FEMALE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY, AFRICAN FRIENDLY SOCIETY, AFRICAN SOCIETY FOR MUTUAL RELIEF, AND FEMALE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY

The Female Benevolent Society and the African Friendly Society were established in 1804 in New Haven, Connecticut. The African Society for Mutual Relief, formed in New York in 1808, focused on the education of free African children. By 1820, this society had purchased a school building that also functioned as a safe house for fugitive slaves and provided material needs to facilitate their escape. Free black women founded the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem in 1832. Other such societies were formed throughout the northern, eastern, and midwestern states.

### MORAL REFORM SOCIETY

The Moral Reform Society was formed in Philadelphia in 1835. This purely benevolent society was under the stewardship of blacks but was open to whites friendly to their cause. The society was involved in both abolishing slavery and encouraging and assisting persons of color to engage in agricultural pursuits in the United States and Canada. Society leaders William Whipper and James Forten strongly advocated the use of nonviolence and a strategy of moral force in the work of abolishing slavery. These leaders advocated the principles of humanitarian ideals and universal peace.

### UNION BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES

It was not uncommon for secret societies to allow membership and participation by enslaved persons. The Union Benevolent Societies Nos. 1 and 2 illustrate this point. Organized in 1843 and 1852, respectively, by free Africans in Lexington, Kentucky, their purpose was to care for the sick, bury the dead, encourage education and industry among free Africans, and help enslaved

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people acquire freedom. According to Work, a number of white people knew of the Union Benevolent Societies and aided them. They did not know, however, that a portion of the membership included enslaved persons. Nor did slave owners know that the society was actively engaged in Underground Railroad work.[14] Following the Civil War, the society invested in property and purchased land to establish a cemetery for its members and their families.

## Fraternal Orders

The question might logically be raised why Freemasonry was sought by blacks as a model for organizing their associations. The answer appears to be twofold. First, secret fraternal orders were part of the ancestral and historical memory bank of enslaved Africans. These organizations had long been an influential part of the African social, economic, political, and cultural landscape. Second, at their most profound level, the ideals of fraternal orders (Freemasonry in particular) emphasized truth, light, charity, and a brotherhood of builders or leaders working together to form strong communities. Further, these groups were intricately connected to various aspects of Christianity. Fraternal orders, because of their roots, were perceived as creditable and prestigious organizations in early-nineteenth-century America.

But there is another reason these organizations came into existence, and Brawley describes it well: "Generally close to the social aims of the church, and sometimes directly fathered by [it], the secret societies were the benefit organizations, which even in the days of slavery existed for aid in sickness or at death; in fact, it was the hopelessness of the general situation coupled with the yearning for care when helpless that largely called these societies into being."[15] What was needed was a vehicle to assist black people in uplifting one another, while developing a blueprint to shape their character and a clear sense of their own human capacities. A plan was needed to counter the socialization of black people during slavery as subservient and ignorant nonentities. By affiliating with and embracing fraternal societies, the early leadership of these orders perceived that they could demonstrate, through their own self-help initiatives and moral imperatives, that the deep prejudices whites held toward them were wrong. Further, these organizations provided leaders with a structure through which they could both teach and learn essential lessons of citizenship.

Another likely reason that fraternal orders were attractive to blacks is a more practical one. Free blacks lacked access to power through formal organi-

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zations during the colonial era. The rights of white men were dominant during those years, and blacks wanted to enlarge their sphere by becoming truly *free men* as well as Freemasons. They wanted a voice in government and a share in the fruits of the new democracy. Armed with the ideological weapons of independence and republicanism, they became increasingly aware of the power of group solidarity in waging struggles for equality and human rights.

## PRINCE HALL–AFFILIATED FREEMASONRY: THE FIRST BLACK FRATERNAL ORGANIZATION

The founding of the first African lodge took place forty-two years after Freemasonry was first organized in the colonies among whites. Prince Hall, founder and the first grand master of the African Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons No. 1, looms large in black Freemasonry, as he did in life. Early in 1775, he applied for membership in the prestigious St. John's Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons in Boston, but he was rejected on the basis of race and because he had been a slave (presumably on the island of Barbados). Fueled by the desire to become a Mason, and armed with agency, Hall convinced an Irish military lodge stationed in Boston to grant him membership after undergoing rigorous scrutiny attesting to his knowledge of the guild. Oral history traditions among black Masons posit that Hall was equipped with knowledge of Masonry long before he left Barbados for America, presumably learned in the household of his owner.

During 1775, a month or so after his own initiation into the Irish lodge, Hall assembled a group of fourteen black initiates, and they *received the light* into the mysteries of Freemasonry by the same Irish military lodge. In 1784, this lodge became the first black free and accepted lodge in the United States, but it was not until 1787, after most of these men had served in the Continental army during the Revolution, that they were granted a charter from the Mother Lodge of England, a warrant of dispensation authorizing them to form African Lodge No. 459. This lodge was later renamed African Lodge No. 1 and then the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, after its founder. Hall was raised to the degree of master Mason,[16] the first one of African descent initiated into the order in the U.S. colonies.[17]

Following the chartering of African Lodge No. 1, Hall granted authority to thirteen other men who had been initiated in England and Ireland to set up a lodge in Philadelphia. A third lodge was organized under his authority in Providence, Rhode Island. Regional lodges continued to develop throughout

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the New England states, not only signaling a growing desire among blacks for such organizational affiliations but also positioning these Masons to enlarge their structure by forming state-level grand lodges to unite the various independent lodges.

These developments were viewed by whites as acts of defiance and resulted in charges that the black Masons were creating illegitimate lodges. Members of white grand lodges thought that they held supreme and exclusive territorial jurisdiction and had the sole right to authorize the chartering of any other lodge within that jurisdiction. At a deeper level, however, white Masons believed that blacks were "morally and intellectually incapacitated to discharge the obligations which members assume or have conferred upon them in a Masonic Lodge."[18] Threads of this perspective remained alive in these organizations throughout the nineteenth century.

As a leader and the first grand master of the African Free and Accepted Masons, Prince Hall set the tone for his followers when he charged his brothers to "respect and help each other, work to end slavery, and show love to all humanity."[19] This charge served as a template for other leaders who developed similar fraternal and benevolent societies. Hall devoted the last two decades of his life to carving a niche in Freemasonry for black men. These were years marked by incredible change, and Hall sought opportunities, within the traditions and structures of Freemasonry, to create inclusion and full equality for blacks in the new Republic.

Moreover, the black lodges were designed to operate on two or more levels: as a recreation of the proverbial *village,* a place offering protection from external threats to their humanity, and as an internal site for educating and developing political consciousness. Their achievements were extraordinary as leaders of these organizations carved into the American landscape a recognizable *place* for themselves and others. It is helpful to recall that Prince Hall was operating in the same milieu, at the same time, and in the same city as Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, and Benjamin Franklin. The latter are credited with laying the cornerstones for democracy and liberty in this country, yet their hypocritical postures toward slavery and the essence of full human liberty are often ignored by historians.

Although attempts were made to exclude blacks from elected positions in legislative chambers and centers of government, Prince Hall and his followers persisted in their struggle to acquire full rights of citizenship for people of African descent, even though white leaders were developing a more restrictive type of democracy. In the same manner that the libertarian ideals of *liberty*

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and *natural rights* found expression in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, these same sentiments found expression in the visions, organizational structures, and agendas of the first black fraternal and benevolent societies as well.

Some charge that black fraternal and benevolent societies were merely "imitations" of similar white societies. From this perspective, the aspiration of blacks to lift themselves up by becoming "joiners" of such societies reduces them to "the community of striving blacks."[20] Countering these racist and ethnocentric notions were leaders like Prince Hall, a man who lifted himself from the condition of enslavement to become successful as a patriot, civic leader, minister, entrepreneur, and protest and uplift leader. He was not an anomaly among his peers. Rather, his activities, like those of numerous other African men of his era, reflected personal agency, persistent and assertive methods of agitation, and political activism. Their achievements include a long list of mutual aid causes and educational, religious, benevolent, and charitable endeavors.

Prince Hall used the structure and idealism of Freemasonry to gain a serious political public voice, to overcome slavery and racism, and to cross class barriers. He authored petitions to the Massachusetts Assembly urging full citizenship for blacks and an allowance for their participation in the governance of the young American Republic. He petitioned for schools and equal treatment under the laws governing the country. In 1797, he delivered the earliest publicly recorded antislavery address by a black person. What is significant about Hall's actions is the extent to which they reflect his early use of the "master's tools." He was also acutely aware of the hypocrisy and dual standards inherent in the American form of democracy—enslaving persons while professing liberty for individuals. The same dualities were apparent within the American practice of Freemasonry, and he addressed these as well. Many of the new Republic's founding fathers were Freemasons, and their presence in government increased significantly as the century unfolded. Leading figures such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were active in Freemasonry, and it has been estimated that at least nineteen of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were Freemasons as well.

On December 7, 1807, after an illness of four weeks, Prince Hall died at the age of seventy-two, surrounded by his third wife, brotherhood of Masons, friends, and other mourners. His death took place a little less than a month before the law prohibiting the further importation of enslaved people to America went into effect, and his persistent petitions had helped drive Massachusetts to become one of the first states to emancipate its enslaved popula-

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tion. After more than twenty years of race-conscious leadership, Hall was known as the most visible and articulate free African public figure in Boston. By the time of his death, he had achieved the status of a village elder within his community, a wise and trusted leader. Further, he became a revered symbol of black Masons for all time. W. E. B. DuBois recognized the uplifting efforts of Prince Hall and other leaders as "the first wavering step of a people toward more organized social life."[21]

At the halfway point of the nineteenth century, Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masonic Lodges had been formed in twenty-three other states and in Canada. At least seven of those states were strong pro-slavery states. The growth and political activism of Masons continued at phenomenal rates, enabling the Masons to spread their uplift agendas to all parts of the country. Fifty years later, near the end of the nineteenth century, the society included more than forty grand lodges, at least 5,000 local and regional lodges, and upward of 300,000 members, many noted for their economic successes and their social and political prominence.

As a body, the Prince Hall–affiliated Masons organized and implemented significant racial uplift functions, including acquiring and purchasing property; establishing educational opportunities; and caring for the sick, the elderly, widows, and orphans. The provision of health and life insurance was another valuable benefit for members, at a time when such insurance was not readily available to blacks. Molding and shaping character for the race remained a strong focus. Collectively, these organized efforts helped develop community and fostered a living representation of the fruits of financial and professional successes based on cooperative efforts.

Perhaps it is ironic, or perhaps it is a testament to the black members' commitment to the principle of universal brotherhood—all men "one blood"—that Hall's successor was a Russian of white descent. Nero Prince, the second grand master of the Prince Hall African Grand Lodge, filled the office from 1807 to 1809.[22] Although his parents were Russian Jews, he identified with men of color and worked vigorously to further the aims of the grand lodge. When rumors of war between Russia and France spread in 1811, he returned to Moscow and served as a guard to the Russian emperor. After working for nearly a dozen years as a footman at the court of the Russian czar, Nero Prince returned to St. Petersburg with his second wife, a black woman named Mary, who would later write about being received in the Russian court, where there was no prejudice against color.[23]

Additionally, in June 1893, John G. Jones, an attorney and active member

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of Chicago's Prince Hall Lodge, founded the Imperial Grand Council of the Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine.[24] This took place during the Chicago Columbian Exposition, when large numbers of blacks convened in the city, and this body was granted a dispensation by representatives of the Grand Council of Arabia. In 1901, its name was changed to the Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine of North and South America and Its Jurisdictions, Inc. The most recent history of the "Shriners," as they are called, is traced back to 1872. During that time, two white Masons living in New York, one a medical doctor and the other an actor, created the rituals and designed the emblem, costumes, and primary symbol, the crescent.

For each Prince Hall–affiliated Masonic "house," complementary female houses were created, such as the Eastern Stars, the Daughters of Isis, the Golden Circle, and the Heroines of Jericho. Eastern Star history dates back to the eighteenth century; in 1730, the Grand Orient of France established the first organization of females to be under the guardianship of male lodges. The practice of establishing Eastern Star branches began in white lodges in the United States around 1868, when Robert Macoy completed work started by Robert Morris to create a structure and rituals for white women. Interest in the Order of Eastern Stars became widespread among blacks, and on December 1, 1874, the Prince Hall Free and Accepted Masons established the Eastern Stars, an affiliated group primarily for women, although the brothers could earn Eastern Star degrees as well. Originating in Washington, D.C., and initiated by Thornton Jackson, the chapter became known as an Adoptive Rite of Freemasonry, with teachings based on both the Bible and principles of the lodge. Eastern Star members practice "individual righteousness, elevating society by elevating its units."[25] Although Eastern Star members have some autonomy in making decisions, such as choosing initiates, each chapter requires two functional male officers—a patron and an assistant patron—one of whom must be present at each meeting in order to constitute a quorum. Membership requires a kinship relation to a Mason, which means that Eastern Stars are the wives, widows, sisters, daughters, mothers, or granddaughters (primarily) of Masons. The "worthy matron" presides over meetings of the Eastern Star Order. Eastern Star members engage in a variety of charitable and service projects, provide leadership opportunities for their members and youth, and support the work of the grand lodge. The order draws women from all walks of life and from diverse regions. Devotion to religious concerns, fidelity to family and friends, patience and submission in the face of wrongs, and respect for the binding force of their vows are essential to their success as Daughters of the Order.

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The Daughters of Isis, named after the Egyptian deity, was formed on November 13, 1901, when a charter was granted in Washington, D.C., to the Imperial Court Daughters of Isis of North and South America and Its Jurisdictions. It serves as an auxiliary to the Imperial Council, Ancient Egyptian Arabic Order Nobles Mystic Shrine of North and South America, Inc. Promoting the principles of loyalty, faithfulness, and patriotism and providing community leadership and acts of charity are among the precepts guiding the Daughters of Isis.[26]

The Order of the Golden Circle was established in 1886, although some sources give the date as 1908.[27] This group, which operates on both the local and state levels, serves as an auxiliary to Masons in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry who have obtained the thirty-second and thirty-third degrees.[28] Wives, widows, mothers, sisters, and daughters of Scottish Rite Masons are eligible for membership. A male supervises and attends each meeting of the Golden Circle. Titles for the sisters of the Golden Circle carry the prefix "loyal lady," with the head being known as the loyal lady ruler; the highest-ranking male official is the "illustrious deputy."

The Heroines of Jericho was established as an auxiliary for the wives and daughters of Prince Hall–affiliated Royal Arch Masons. The society operates at the local, state, and international levels. The "most ancient matron" leads the local society. Like the Eastern Stars, a male member must be present when the Heroines meet; this person usually holds the title "most worthy Joshua."

## GRAND UNITED ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS

The Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was the next largest black fraternal organization to develop, following the Prince Hall Masons. This secret fraternal order was founded in New York in 1843, sixty-eight years after African Lodge No. 459. Faced with the same discrimination that the Prince Hall Masons experienced, the founders were required to secure a charter from England because the U.S. order would not grant them a warrant to establish an order. Today, the order remains attached to the Mother Branch of the International Order of Odd Fellows in England. Peter Ogden, a free black man who had been initiated into the International Order of Odd Fellows in Liverpool, England, sometime prior to 1843, used his influence to help a New York–based group receive a charter. Members of the New York City Philomenthean Institute Literary Club organized that city's first Odd Fellows lodge for black men.[29] The lodge was chartered as the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows No. 645, and its symbols included a chain that represented friendship, love, and charity.

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Very little is known about Peter Ogden. He was a ship steward on the *Patrick Henry,* which sailed regularly between New York and England. This was considered a rather lucrative position, providing good pay and the opportunity to see the world. When the charter was granted to Lodge No. 645, Ogden was commissioned as the American Odd Fellows agent for England's Committee of Management. The white Odd Fellows refused to recognize him in any official capacity, however—a reflection of their vow to remain segregated. Yet Ogden played a significant leadership role in Lodge No. 645 and was known as an artful and articulate leader. His sense of agency and spirit of assertiveness were similar to that displayed by Prince Hall. Ogden's service, both to the Odd Fellows and to the uplift movement, was cut short by his early death in 1852.

All Odd Fellows—both black and white—acknowledge the authority of the church, but the organization has no strong connections to it. Odd Fellows strive to use their knowledge and sense of brotherhood for the development and elevation of the whole man. The order views itself as the "Friendly Society," and its membership comprises men from a cross section of occupations and class levels. The growth of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was rapid among blacks due to the order's message of friendship, love, and truth and its emphasis on charity, benevolence, morality, and temperance. It is estimated that 300,000 to 400,000 members were actively participating in the order at the close of the nineteenth century.

In 1857, the Odd Fellows received approval from the Grande Lodge of England to create the Household of Ruth. The Ruth degree, established by Patrick Reason, was implemented to enlist the support of women on behalf of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows.[30] The general objective was to more intimately acquaint wives, widows, and daughters of members with the lodge. More than 400 Household of Ruth auxiliaries were established by 1886, representing a membership of close to 50,000. Ten years later, the number of Households of Ruth had expanded to 959 chapters.

## UNITED BROTHERS OF FRIENDSHIP, SISTERS OF THE MYSTERIOUS TEN, AND JUVENILES

The Order of the United Brothers of Friendship evolved directly from a benevolent society and was organized August 1, 1861, in Louisville, Kentucky, by a group of both free and enslaved blacks. It was the first fraternal society for blacks created south of the Ohio River. The founders were three brothers, Marshall, Asbury, and George Taylor, along with eight other men. Disrupted by the out-

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break of the Civil War, the order did not obtain a charter to form a state grand lodge until February 7, 1868.[31] William H. Gibson, a former teacher of several of the founders, wrote the charter and was elected the first grand master.

The structure of the United Brothers of Friendship closely resembled that of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows, even though the Odd Fellows did not organize in Louisville until later. The purpose of the United Brothers of Friendship was threefold: to promote benevolence, to promote Christianity, and to unite men, women, and children into one fraternal, benevolent, and intellectual order. Thus, in 1876, the organization's exclusive male membership was expanded to include a female branch and juveniles, and the name was changed to the United Brothers of Friendship, Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, and Juveniles. Its primary symbol was a five-pointed star embedded within a triangle and square and inscribed with the words *justice, mercy,* and *truth.* The organization created lodges for men between eighteen and fifty-five years of age and juvenile lodges for boys aged five to eighteen. Membership in the Sisters of the Mysterious Ten was open to women between the ages of sixteen and fifty, with juvenile temples created for girls aged five to sixteen. Despite their attempts at gender inclusiveness, however, all grand lodge officer and delegate positions were reserved for male members. The order's programs included providing military training for men and boys to prepare them for the common defense of the country, providing mutual relief in cases of sickness and death of members, and providing for the care of widows and orphans. The lodge supported temperance and, with few exceptions, did not allow members to participate in the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages or drugs. Men who worked as Internal Revenue Service gaugers, as well as pharmacists, were exempt from this restriction.

The United Brothers of Friendship was effective in attracting members, with more than 30,000 residing in Kentucky alone. Orders were established throughout the Midwest and as far south as Texas and west to California. By the 1890s, membership was estimated at around 200,000, making it the second largest black fraternal order in the country. The headquarters, however, remained in Louisville. Subordinate lodges and temples were encouraged to invest in real estate within their communities, and this became a successful cooperative venture. Many lodges established cemeteries and homes for orphans and infirm widows, reflecting a continued commitment to one of the initial purposes. Major differences over the practice of secret rituals eventually led to the decline of the United Brothers of Friendship, Sisters of the Mysterious Ten, and Juveniles during the 1920s. In some areas, United Brothers of

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Friendship cemeteries are the only tangible remnants of the ideals and existence of this fraternal order.

### KNIGHTS OF PYTHIAS

The Knights of Pythias organized in Washington, D.C., in 1864, exclusively for white men. Black men in the city attempted to start their own order but were rejected by the Supreme Lodge of the Knights of Pythias of the World when it met in Richmond, Virginia, in 1869.[32] In 1870, another group of black men in Philadelphia was denied a charter as well. However, in the South, Dr. Thomas W. Stringer, E. A. Lightfoot, and several other light-skinned mulattoes who could pass for white were initiated into the white order of the Knights of Pythias in Mississippi. This allowed them access to the rituals and other secrets of the order, and they soon began organizing black Pythias lodges in several southern states. The first of these was Lightfoot Lodge No. 1, chartered on March 26, 1880, in Vicksburg, Mississippi. To avoid charges that it was an illegitimate order, a supreme lodge was organized for black Pythians known as the Knights of Pythias of North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Stringer, a well-known Prince Hall Mason and minister of an AME church, is considered the father of black Pythians in that section of the South.[33]

The organizational structure of the Knights of Pythias consists of the supreme lodge, grand lodges, and castles or subordinate lodges at the local level. Its symbol is the bust of a medieval knight in armor, with a sword and ax, placed in an inverted triangle with four smaller triangles inside it. The letters F, C, and B, representing friendship, charity, and benevolence, are inscribed in the triangle as well. An insurance endowment for the benefit of members' families was once one of the stronger programs of the Pythians. They invested in real estate, built temples for their lodges, constructed cemeteries, and performed numerous acts of charity. By 1901, the Pythians had initiated more than 27,000 members, and four years later, the membership was estimated near 70,000. As was the case with the United Brothers of Friendship, membership peaked during the 1920s, but the group remained strong in the southern states.

### INDEPENDENT ORDER OF GOOD SAMARITANS AND DAUGHTERS OF SAMARIA

This society was formed on September 14, 1847, in New York City. Initially, its membership was exclusively white, but it became a black fraternal

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order when white members began defecting shortly after a decision was made to admit a small number of blacks. At least a decade before the Civil War, the Samaritans deviated from a strict policy of racial exclusion by organizing separate lodges for blacks. In a few northern lodges, small numbers of blacks participated in white lodges. This practice, according to David Fahey, was an effort to demonstrate that they repudiated extreme racism.[34] Nevertheless, in practice, the lodges were segregated, and their history is rife with struggles over the race question. By the end of the Civil War, it was an exclusively black society.

Good Samaritan lodges were organized as councils that operated at the local, state, and national levels. Subordinate lodges convened in a grand lodge session on an annual basis. Minutes of the Grand Council No. 8 of Kentucky of the International Order of Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samaria of North America, a black order, reveal that for the years 1908 to 1913, women were active participants in the grand sessions, although they did not fill the top leadership positions.[35] They planned and participated in all public events, such as an annual parade, fund-raisers, and religious programs, and mentored and sponsored the juvenile branches.

Love, purity, and truth were among the main values of the society, and lodges built cemeteries and offered old-age annuities and benefits for members. The Independent Order of Good Samaritans was a temperance society that required total abstinence from alcohol. As practicing "teetotalers," the Good Samaritans were part of the moral reform movement of the nineteenth century. Their efforts extended to a complete ban on the use of alcohol, even for medicinal purposes. An examination of documents of the St. John Lodge of the Independent Order of Good Samaritans, a black lodge in Keene, Kentucky, reveals even more stringent codes of conduct. Governing documents for this order include a table of fines for adultery, intoxication, refusing or neglecting to attend a funeral, refusing or neglecting to sit up with sick or deceased members, failing to attend meetings, failing to vote, and using the words *Miss, Madam,* or *Sir* (ostensibly instead of the terms *right worthy sister templar* or *brother templar*).[36]

## MOSAIC TEMPLARS OF AMERICA

The Mosaic Templars of America was a fraternal benefit society founded in 1882 in Little Rock, Arkansas, through the efforts of Chester Keats and John Bush, both of whom were born into slavery. The organization they fashioned, initially with fifteen members, grew into an international fraternal order with

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more than 2,000 lodges in twenty-three states, South and Central America, the Panama Canal Zone, and the West Indies. Keats was the first national grand master, and under his administration, the order reached over 25,000 members.[37] The Mosaic Templars were involved in both providing a benefit fund for the relief of sick and distressed members and promoting business opportunities. The orders' name was related to the biblical story of Moses, with the objective being to provide leadership for the race as Moses had for the children of Israel. Thus, strong emphasis was placed on love, charity, moral character development, and advancement of the race. The structure of the Mosaic Templars included separate branches for men and women, known as temples and chambers, respectively. There was also an auxiliary for women called the Court of Calanthe.

One of the leading economic programs of the Mosaic Templars was the creation in 1869 of a national building and loan association. It was organized principally for the benefit of members, many of whom were former slaves, and helped them purchase homes and make investments. Other programs included an endowment, a hospital, a burial and monument division, and a training program to stimulate business ownership. A Uniform Rank Department was added for the purpose of training youth—both boys and girls—military drill style. Due to the success of their various business enterprises, the Mosaic Templars served as a model for economic development initiatives for other benefit societies.

### GRAND UNITED ORDER OF TRUE REFORMERS

The history of this organization, which appeared shortly after the Civil War, is intricately tied to its founding body, the International Order of Good Templars. The Good Templars created affiliated orders for blacks as a way to keep their own orders segregated. William Wells Brown, a black author and abolitionist, established a number of orders in southern states. However, he became convinced that the prevailing racism of the Good Templars did not work in the interest of its black members, so he left the international order and affiliated with a different group. Fahey reports that the Grand Lodge of Kentucky published a ritual and named a new order for blacks in 1871: the United Order of True Reformers.[38] The headquarters of the Grand United Order was ultimately in Richmond, Virginia. Despite its origins, the True Reformers reflected the needs and interests of its black membership. In addition to the rituals and traditional structure of a fraternal order, the True Reformers offered its

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members death benefits through insurance policies. Further, the order reflected the desire of many blacks to become economically self-sufficient. Its cooperative economic programs included a bank, hotel, major insurance company, regalia factory, funeral home, and real estate interests. Its roster reportedly surpassed 40,000 members during its peak at the turn of the twentieth century.

### GRAND UNITED ORDER OF GALILEAN FISHERMEN

Founded in Baltimore in 1856, the Galilean Fishermen incorporated in 1869 as a national black fraternity. This order, which grew out of a benevolent society, evolved into an elite group with restrictive membership practices and a focus on business and economic development. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Fishermen were operating a bank in Hampton, Virginia, with more than $250,000 in real estate assets. Other economic features included a newspaper publishing company and a regalia business. They also established homes for orphans, the elderly, and disabled persons. The membership of the Galileans was around 56,000 by 1897.

### IMPROVED BENEVOLENT PROTECTIVE ORDER OF THE ELKS OF THE WORLD

In 1898, Arthur J. Riggs and Benjamin Franklin Howard organized Alpha Lodge No. 1 of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World in Cincinnati, Ohio. This order was modeled after the white Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, a secret fraternal society having components of benevolence and charity, along with a strong emphasis on patriotism and civic education. The objective of Riggs and Howard was to mold an organization that could more fully address the needs of blacks in a manner similar to, but more effectively than, existing societies such as the Odd Fellows, Masons, and Knights of Pythias then operating in Cincinnati. They believed that a new organization was needed to challenge segregation, develop a new wave of leaders, reinstill racial pride, and fight for civil rights and liberties in an assertive but strategic manner, as had been done near the end of the eighteenth century by Prince Hall and his followers.[39] Of particular interest to Riggs and Howard were the program elements of the Elks, because they extended beyond social fellowship, benevolence, and charity to endorse strong patriotism and citizenship programs as well. Educational, economic, and leadership opportunities were other components needed in the black community of Cincinnati, which

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Charles Dickerson described as being "as sophisticated, educated, affluent, and aggressive" as its counterpart in Philadelphia.[40]

Through his work as a Pullman porter, Arthur Riggs became acquainted with the white Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks and chose to pattern and structure the new organization in a parallel manner. Riggs obtained a copy of the Elks' ritual book, which was not copyright protected, and, in partnership with B. J. Howard, reworked the rituals to suit their vision. In what was later perceived by white Elks as a sinister move, Riggs and Howard registered the copyright, listing Riggs as the proprietor rather than author, to avoid charges of copyright infringement.[41] This action created a maelstrom of protests from white Elks, and Riggs was forced to leave Cincinnati for his personal safety. Legal battles ensued for nearly a decade, with the white Elks attempting to persuade the courts to declare the actions of Riggs and Howard a breach of law. In the end, the white Elks were not successful.

Howard obtained a charter for the Ohio lodge under the name of Improved Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World, and he was elected exalted ruler of the lodge. The aims of this fraternal order appealed to the new professional class of black men, and other lodges were organized in both northern and southern states. Some scholars note that the Elks, much like the Shriners, were viewed as less pious and religious, yet both serious and fun-loving. Apparently, this mixture was part of the appeal to new members, and between 1898 and 1906, 100 lodges were created in more than twenty states.[42] This enabled the formation of a grand lodge with a national constituency.

### INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ST. LUKE

Initially a benevolent society, the Order of St. Luke was founded in 1867 by former slave Mary Prout in Baltimore, Maryland, as a sickness and death relief association for black women.[43] By 1869, a chapter was formed in Richmond, Virginia, where it became nationally known under the leadership of Maggie Lena Walker, who functioned as the right worthy grand secretary for several decades starting in 1899. Love, morality, purity, charity, temperance, and brotherly and sisterly love were the main values promulgated. Membership in this society surpassed 100,000 initiates, spread among 2,000 councils in twenty-eight states. Children's "circles" were established as well. Walker started a regalia supply business and organized a printing department for the purpose of publishing a newspaper, which had as many as 6,000 subscribers. St. Luke organized a department store and became one of the largest black

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employers in the city of Richmond. The highlight of Walker's economic development activities was the establishment of a joint stock association that grew into the Penny Savings Bank. Walker is thought to be the first woman in the United States to serve as a bank president. She was certainly the first black woman to achieve this distinction.

As it evolved, the Order of St. Luke admitted both male and female members. It is one of the few fraternal societies in which women played significant leadership roles. According to historian and scholar Elsa Barkley Brown, it became one of the "larger and more successful of the many thousands of mutual benefit societies that developed throughout black communities since the 18th century."[44] This order became very influential in politics, and Walker was the primary catalyst in connecting the order with the collective efforts of other mutual aid and benevolence societies and churches in Richmond.

### INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF THE TWELVE KNIGHTS AND DAUGHTERS OF TABOR

Moses Dickson established the Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor in 1871 as a fraternal order focused on benevolence and financial programs. Dickson, born a free man in Cincinnati, Ohio, had a lengthy history organizing for benevolent causes. Along with eleven other men, he had established a society known as the Knights of Liberty in 1846;[45] its objective was to overthrow slavery. Dickson worked for more than ten years organizing both free and enslaved men who were willing to aid fugitives and fight for freedom. During the Civil War, these men eagerly enlisted in the Union army, once black men were allowed to do so. After his discharge from service with the U.S. Colored Troops, Dickson again put his organizing skills to work. The name for the new fraternal organization, Twelve Knights of Tabor, was chosen as a memorial to the twelve men who had founded the Knights of Liberty. Headquarters for the Knights of Tabor was in St. Louis, Missouri. Eventually, more than 25,000 members throughout the Midwest joined this order.

## Fraternal and Benevolent Societies and the Development of Black Greek-Letter Organizations

Despite a history spanning 228 years, the contributions of early black leaders toward creating an organized social life for blacks are not well known. Numer-

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ous reasons, both concrete and abstract, can be cited, which may help illustrate their importance in developing templates for subsequent organizations, including black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs). Fraternal and benevolent organizations were created expressly to give members a sense of social responsibility toward one another. At the core of these early leaders' efforts to organize was the theme of *racial uplift*. Racial subordination was a glaring flaw in the documents creating the new Republic. Thus, the crusade to address racism was vital to these early leaders. They organized and used fraternal and benevolent societies to create a public voice of protest that demanded full citizenship.

When BGLOs started developing on college and university campuses at the turn of the twentieth century, their organizational structures bore remarkable similarities to those of the secret societies of their forebears. For one, it is quite likely that they employed some of the same practices found in these groups' rituals.[46] Additionally, and perhaps more important, BGLOs organized with a multidimensional purpose in mind, including mutual support in a racially hostile environment and racial uplift. The history of Alpha Phi Alpha, the first intercollegiate BGLO, attests to this fact, particularly with regard to the latter. Wesley writes: "Pressures of segregation, discrimination, mistreatment, prejudice, caste and neglect of consideration were being exerted on the black people in many places. . . . There is considerable evidence that the students at Cornell University, who comprised the Social Study Club and the fraternity, were interested in these happenings and were seriously concerned about them." He goes on to quote Alpha founder Henry Callis as saying, "Society offered us narrowly circumscribed opportunity and no security. Out of our need, our fraternity brought social purpose and social action."[47] Other BGLOs expressed this sentiment as well.

Quite possibly, the similarity to secret societies can be attributed to the fact that several of the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha were members of such groups, or the sons of members. For example, Vertner Tandy was a member of the Masons; his father, Henry Tandy, a prominent businessman in Lexington, Kentucky, was a master Mason as well as a member of the Knights Templar, and United Brothers of Friendship. Robert Ogle was an officer for the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks, and George Kelley was district deputy grand master of the Mason's Grand Lodge of New York. Moreover, it is likely that Alpha's selection of a "jeweled" badge and the use of the term *jewels* to identify its members are linked to Masonic iconography. Certainly, secret rituals, restrictive membership, and a focus on charity through community and public service are keystones of these old-line fraternities that

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were adopted by the Alphas and other BGLOs. However, the connections between the founders of other BGLOs and these old-line societies, as well as the depth of the interconnections among these groups, remain to be fully researched and documented.

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11. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom,* 1.

12. Lorenzo Johnson Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 27.

13. Robert L. Harris Jr., "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780–1830," *Massachusetts Review* 22, no. 3 (1979): 617; Berlin, *Slaves without Masters,* 58. For further discussion of caste, color, and class, see Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1980); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); James Oliver Horton, *Free People of Color Inside the Black Community* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). Joseph E. Holloway, *Africanisms in American Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

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1990), discusses the "blue vein" society in New Orleans in which membership was based on skin color.

14. Work, *Negro Year Book,* 294.

15. Brawley, *Social History of the American Negro,* 73.

16. Masonic degrees represent a stage or level of membership. All initiates enter and gain membership through a symbolic blue lodge (in Masonic terms, the word *lodge* can refer to either a group of Masons or the building where they meet) and earn their first three degrees: entered apprentice, fellowcraft, and master Mason. The degree structure enables a member to progress further through either the York or the Scottish Rite Branch until he reaches the highest level, the thirty-second degree; there is also an honorary thirty-third degree. Within the York Rite Branch, additional degrees can be earned through the Royal Arch Chapter: mark master, past master, most excellent master, royal arch master, and royal master degrees. The next level, the Council of Royal and Select Masters, provides two degrees: royal and select master. From this level, one can proceed toward three additional degrees in the Commandery of Knights Templar: Red Cross Knight, Knight of Malta, and Knight Templar, the highest degree in the York Rite. The Scottish Rite Branch has a similar structure and offers degrees up to the thirty-second via the Lodge of Perfection, the Grand Chapter of Rose Croix, the Council of Kadosh, and the Consistory.

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# 4

# The Grand Boulé at the Dawn of a New Century

## Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity

*William H. Harris*

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the nation that had developed from the British colonies on the North American shores of the Atlantic Ocean had expanded to occupy the length and breadth of the continent. Indeed, the United States of America now spanned from sea to shining sea. On the Atlantic were metropolises such as Boston and New York City, while Los Angeles and San Francisco lay on the shores of the Pacific. In between, the great cities of Chicago and St. Louis, the luscious plains, the southern farmlands, and the vastness of Texas and the Southwest contributed to the nation's might. The still new nation, by world standards, stood in splendid isolation, protected between the two oceans. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States was a magnificent example of the good fortune that could befall a nation.

Yet the United States had not come this far without difficulty, and not all of its citizens shared in the bounty. Even settlers in the earliest colony had struggled with the fundamental issue of race. From the first days of colonization, North America was occupied by both Europeans, mainly British, and Africans. The Europeans, the dominant group, were intent on showing that one could build a nation on smoke, but doing so required massive amounts of labor to grow the precious tobacco that could make the dream real. Over the years, the colonists added cotton, another labor-intensive crop, to the products that contributed to the wealth of America. To meet their teeming labor needs, the Europeans imported men and women from Africa in greater and greater numbers in what became part of the largest slave trade in the history of the world.

As the numbers of Africans and Europeans increased, the leaders of the colonies cobbled together two paradoxical frameworks: one of the harshest systems of human slavery ever known, and the greatest institution of participatory democracy and protection of individual rights in the world. During



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the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, through a series of wars, the colonies freed themselves from British control and established the independent nation of the United States of America. The new nation adopted the racial laws that had permitted slavery in the colonies, and its new Constitution forbade Congress to interfere with the international slave trade for twenty years. It is important to note that as soon as that restriction expired, Congress outlawed the Atlantic slave trade to the United States, but it did not outlaw slavery.[1]

During the early to mid-nineteenth century, a major divide over slavery developed, culminating in the 1860s in a war that divided North against South and, in many instances, brother against brother. Citizens of the northern states, fighting under the leadership of President Abraham Lincoln to preserve the Union and eventually to outlaw slavery, prevailed. The Civil War resulted in the elimination of slavery and the freedom of millions of American-born descendants of Africans. African Americans also received a constitutional guarantee of equal citizenship as a result of the war. Further, the newly united federal government was recognized as one of the most powerful governments in the world.

Despite the victory by the North and the constitutional amendments that followed, it would be incorrect to conclude that the Civil War and the subsequent Reconstruction marked the end of race as a major issue in the United States. It is true that for a time, numerous people made efforts to integrate the former slaves into the fabric of American life, but this was not to be. In fact, as the twentieth century approached, the situation for African Americans was such that one historian dubbed it the nadir of their time in America. The United States was far from welcoming to black Americans, and this would not change for another century. Race remained the most important issue in America.[2]

In 1903, W. E. B. DuBois, in his book *Souls of Black Folk,* observed that "the problem of the twentieth century is the color line."[3] Shortly before, DuBois had completed *The Philadelphia Negro,* a major study of African Americans in Philadelphia.[4] He found that progress among the general black population was such that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, approximately 7,500 African Americans were college graduates. Indeed, Philadelphia counted several physicians, dentists, lawyers, schoolteachers, and other professionals among its African American residents. These DuBois termed the black "aristocracy," or the "Talented Tenth." But such blacks did not associate with whites of the same professions. Although his study showed considerable progress for some African Americans in that city, for the most part, African Americans of what-

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ever status or professional attainment remained isolated from mainstream—that is, white—American life. Philadelphia was not unique in this regard; as DuBois pointed out in studies of Chicago and New York City (the latter for the *New York Times*), racial isolation was the norm in those cities as well. Philadelphia, like the rest of America, was black and white.

Among the African American population, the "aristocracy" felt isolated from the black masses. DuBois's study concluded that the educated group did little to push the entire race forward, partly out of fear of being mistaken for the masses themselves. Members of the upper class rationalized their inactivity as leaders by arguing that they refused to draw the very color line that they protested. Further, the economic status of the upper group (inordinately dedicated to a higher standard of living) was nearly as unstable as that of other African Americans. Although almost all in the aristocracy were dependent on the masses for their incomes, they were too insecure to worry about the problems of those people.[5]

The situation became more acute when large numbers of African Americans began to migrate from the rural South to northern cities and to the West. These migrants, termed "newcomers" by the older black residents, brought with them rural habits and conditions that the old-timers, regardless of their economic or educational standing, considered beneath them. The newcomers talked too loud, ate lunch and other meals on public conveyances, and in other ways contravened the mores of their new homes. Sometimes the animosity was quiet, but on some occasions, the self-appointed black guardians of good society lectured the new masses on what was expected of them. In one telling piece, the *Chicago Defender,* a black newspaper with a national readership and a reputation as a champion of blacks' rights, admonished the newcomers in bold letters to "KEEP YOUR MOUTHS SHUT, PLEASE! THERE IS ENTIRELY TOO MUCH TALKING ON THE STREETCARS AMONG OUR NEWCOMERS!"[6] Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the small group of educated and professional African American men felt isolated from both whites and other blacks. Further, their struggle to make a living was so mean that they hardly had time to know one another.

Sigma Pi Phi fraternity was born of these circumstances. Black men of distinction had long functioned in various leadership posts, especially in churches and benevolent associations. Some, notably Frederick Douglass, had even served in high government posts. But by and large, their lives were separate from those of the black masses and the white professionals and leadership groups. In 1904, a small cadre in Philadelphia set out to create an organization

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that would provide a vehicle for men of standing and similar tastes to come together to know one another.

Henry McKee Minton was the leading figure in the discussions about organizing such a group. He was born in Columbia, South Carolina, on Christmas Day 1871. By the time he was five years old, his parents had moved to Washington, D.C., where Minton began public school. He eventually spent two years at the Academy at Howard University and then went to Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, from which he graduated in 1891. Minton then studied law for a year before attending the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, from which he graduated in 1895. Now a licensed pharmacist, Minton opened a drugstore in Philadelphia and for seven years operated the only black-owned drugstore in the city.

Though he made a good living and became a mainstay among the leading African Americans in Philadelphia, Minton decided to pursue another interest. In 1902, he entered Jefferson Medical School, where he would study for the next four years while he continued to operate his drugstore. While in medical school, Minton also spent considerable time contemplating the isolation in which accomplished black men lived and worked. He began to talk with other black professionals about their shared condition and about the idea of forming an organization that would bring them together in fellowship.

Minton thought that an organization for black learned and professional men "should be a fraternity in the true sense of the word; one whose chief thought should not be to visit the sick and bury the dead, but to bind men of like qualities, tastes, and attainments into a close and sacred union that they might know the best of one another." Members would not be "selected on the basis of brains alone—but in addition congeniality, culture and good fellowship; that they shall have behind them [at initiation] a record of accomplishment, not merely men of promise and good education." His fraternity would contain the "best of Skull and Bones of Yale and of Phi Beta Kappa."[7] His organization would combine fellowship and congeniality (Skull and Bones) with scholarship and achievement (Phi Beta Kappa). Algernon B. Jackson, a physician, was Minton's earliest and closest conversant on these matters.

After months of conversation with Jackson and some discussions with Edward C. Howard and Richard C. Warrick, also physicians, Minton met with all three at Howard's home on May 15, 1904. At that meeting, the four men decided to proceed with Minton's idea that they form a fraternity of like-minded men. Jackson volunteered to prepare the ritual, and Minton would write the constitution. The men agreed to meet again in two weeks to solidify

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their organization. In the interim, they recruited two other physicians, Robert J. Abele and Eugene R. Hinson, to join their group. Thus, when they reconvened at the end of May 1904, the group stood at six (five physicians and one—Minton—in medical school).

At that second meeting, these young men (their average age was thirty-two) adopted the ritual and constitution and established a cadre of officers for the new fraternity. In that first constitution, the group proclaimed that:

> Whereas it seems wise and good that men of ambition, refinement and self-respect should seek the society of each other both for the mutual benefit and to be an example of the higher type of manhood.
>
> Be it Resolved that a society be organized for the purpose of binding men of like qualities into a close, sacred, fraternal union, that they may know the best of one another, and that each in this life may to his full ability aid the other, and by concerted action bring about those things that seem best for all that cannot be accomplished by individual effort.[8]

The group adopted the sphinx, the symbol of wisdom and the power of silence, as its insignia. The insignia would carry the Greek letters Sigma Pi Phi: Sigma for *Sophia,* meaning wisdom, the kind obtained by long study and earnest searching after truth; Pi for *Pistis,* meaning faith; and Phi for *Philea,* meaning brotherhood, the very reason for which the fraternity was founded. What resulted was the establishment of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, the first Greek-letter fraternity founded among African Americans. The principal officers were the sire archon (president), grammateus (secretary), thesauristes (treasurer), grapter (journal editor), rhetoricos (lecturing archon), and agogos (leading archon). Significantly, unlike the other African American Greek-letter organizations, members of Sigma Pi Phi were already college graduates at the time of initiation.[9]

The fraternity's founders were all from the medical profession, but Sigma Pi Phi was never intended to be a professional organization of physicians. The dominance of physicians in the founding group represents a simple reality. Medicine was one of the few professions in which learned African Americans could be judged on their own merits. Unlike in the law or other professions, in which one's competence is subjectively evaluated by others (e.g., judges, prosecutors, or jurors, in the case of lawyers), physicians are judged by the well-being of their patients. If a person is sick and a physician treats him and makes him well, that person does not care about others' opinions of the physician's

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competence and standing. Such recognition notwithstanding, however, one should not assume that black physicians received privileges from white facilities or enjoyed equal standing with white physicians.

The founders of Sigma Pi Phi sought to bring together not just men of ability but also men of congeniality. Once the fraternity was established, its leaders set out to cement an organization in which the members, all personally distinguished, would come to appreciate and "know the best of one another" and together make contributions to society that they could not achieve individually. From the beginning, Sigma Pi Phi was a learned society, a social fraternity, and an advancement organization, albeit a quiet one. Indeed, the founders were so closely involved in Mercy and Douglass Hospitals (which later merged) that a contemporary referred to it as "a boulé project."[10] In addition, the fraternity believed absolutely in the equal standing of its members and insisted that anyone who was eligible for membership was qualified to lead. The founders were so certain of this fact that the fraternity selected all its officers by lot, a custom that continued until 1970.

The founders' emphasis on equality and mutual respect stemmed in large measure from their devotion to the democratic traditions of ancient Greece and to the customs of leadership that existed there among free men. Central to this idea was the boulé—the council of chiefs, or the leading noblemen, of the society.[11] Individual members of the boulé were known as archons. Such men provided the intellectual and civic leadership for the general society. Accordingly, the founders, especially Jackson, emphasized the organization's responsibility to admit only men of achievement and distinction in both their professional and personal lives. Thus, Sigma Pi Phi fraternity became known as the Boulé, and individual members were designated archons. As the fraternity evolved and the spouses of members became an integral part of the organization, it adopted the Greek term *archousa* to designate an archon's wife.[12]

Unlike in many other organizations, no single personality dominated Sigma Pi Phi through the years. Henry Minton drew the coveted lot at that second meeting at the end of May 1904 and became the first leader, called the sire archon, of Alpha Boulé. This was fitting, for the fraternity had been his idea. But Sigma Pi Phi was hardly a national fraternity at that time; all of the members were affiliated with the one group in Philadelphia. Over the months, however, as they met in members' homes and enjoyed one another's fellowship and friendship, they realized that there were others in Philadelphia and elsewhere throughout the nation who shared their interests and could contribute to their brotherhood. Thus, from the beginning, the members of Alpha Boulé

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envisioned a time when archons of member boulés from throughout the country would come together in a national fraternity. Indeed, in the original constitution of Alpha Boulé, the framers pointed out that "when the boulés shall number three, each boulé shall send at such time and to a place designated by Alpha Boulé two delegates who shall meet and form the Grand Boulé."[13] They set no timeline for such an occasion, but they moved quickly to expand their membership, especially at home. Within the first year, Alpha Boulé more than doubled its membership from the original six to thirteen.

Several issues troubled Sigma Pi Phi members. One, the matter of whether and how to expand the membership to other cities and whether to invite new members to the existing boulés, was answered quickly. Minton's activities led directly to the establishment of boulés beyond Philadelphia and laid the foundation on which Sigma Pi Phi fraternity became a national organization.

Shortly after graduating from medical school in 1906, Minton decided that he wanted to start his medical career somewhere other than Philadelphia, despite his standing in the City of Brotherly Love. He first considered Pittsburgh but soon found that the possibilities there were limited, so he moved on to Chicago. In that city, he met several physicians and other black leaders who shared the attributes of the members of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity in Philadelphia.

Minton was particularly heartened by the eager support he received from Dr. Charles E. Bentley, a distinguished African American leader of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and from Dr. Allen A. Wesley. Bentley, a dentist and founder of the Chicago Dental Society, was also a cofounder, with W. E. B. DuBois, of the Niagara Movement, which convened in 1905 at Niagara Falls. The Niagara Movement was the first major impetus of the twentieth century to demand equal rights for African Americans, and in 1909, it spawned the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Minton talked with some of the men he met about the fraternity and specifically about their interest in founding such a group in Chicago. They responded eagerly to the idea of a boulé in Chicago, and in 1907, Minton, along with Algernon B. Jackson of Alpha Boulé, led in the establishment of Beta Boulé of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity.[14]

Others soon set out to do the same thing in Baltimore. On May 8, 1908, representatives of Alpha Boulé went to that city and created Gamma Boulé, the third member boulé of Sigma Pi Phi.This brought the number of member boulés to the minimum required to form a Grand Boulé. Therefore, Minton called the first meeting of the Grand Boulé of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity to meet

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in Philadelphia on August 31, 1908. On that date, six delegates of the three boulés and eleven other archons convened, as requested.

During the four-day meeting, the delegates established the Grand Boulé, and in September 1908, Sigma Pi Phi fraternity became a national organization. The delegates adopted a constitution based largely on the constitution of Alpha Boulé and established officers along the same lines. The officers of the national group added "grand" before their titles; thus, the Grand Boulé's sire archon became the grand sire archon.

The members of the fraternity worked diligently over the next decade, against significant odds, to continue to expand the reach of the fraternity in terms of both membership and member boulés. Another important task was securing a charter and thus formalizing the organization. The original Grand Boulé in Philadelphia established a committee to secure the charter, but when the Grand Boulé reconvened the following year in Baltimore, the committee had not succeeded in securing the charter, and there were still only three local boulés.

Failure to formalize the organization and to expand to other cities constituted the first major difficulties for the fraternity. Grand Sire Archon Minton, in his 1909 report to the Grand Boulé in Baltimore, lamented this fact and stated: "whatever has been the cause of the failure to have these things done must be removed unless we are always to stand still. Unless at the end of each fiscal year we can show to the members of our local boulés that we have made some progress, their interest in the Fraternity will soon be on the wane and we will with difficulty retain them within the fold."[15] The delegates reaffirmed their commitment to secure a charter and expand the membership and vowed that the report at the next Grand Boulé, which would meet in two years, would be different.

It is unclear why obtaining a charter proved to be so difficult, but the expansion efforts faced several obstacles. The founders and leaders of the Boulé insisted that all members of a potential member boulé must meet the standards of those already in the fraternity. Given the travel and communication limitations of the time, gaining information about potential members was difficult and time-consuming. The expansion issue was further complicated by Sigma Pi Phi's educational qualifications. The issue was not only that a limited number of black men had graduated from college and thus were available for consideration, but also that in many cities with established black leadership, such as Washington, D.C., and Atlanta, Georgia, many of the leaders had not attained a college degree. Accordingly, it was difficult to identify a local orga-

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nizer for the boulé who would agree to put together a list of potential candidates that omitted his friends and other recognized leaders of the community simply because they had not had an opportunity to go to college. That factor retarded expansion in some areas for years.[16]

Expansion efforts between 1909 and 1911 were retarded by another factor, namely, Grand Sire Archon J. C. Asbury's failure to work on behalf of the fraternity. In fact, Grand Grammateus Allen A. Wesley, in his report to the Grand Boulé in 1911, complained of the grand sire's "failing to do what was expected of him, indeed not doing anything at all." Wesley explained that he and the grand thesauristes, William C. McCard, had taken it upon themselves to do what was necessary "to keep the Grand Boulé alive."[17]

Given these conditions, Wesley and McCard had authorized two archons from Beta Boulé, who "were spending some time in Memphis, Tennessee, to do what they could to set up a boulé" there. The archons complied and on June 17, 1910, telegraphed Wesley that Delta Boulé would be created that very night.[18]

Some members of the fraternity objected strenuously to the manner in which the boulé in Memphis was established. The archons of Gamma Boulé, as a group, complained that Wesley and McCard had not followed the constitution and that the members had not had the opportunity to scrutinize the candidates for membership in Delta Boulé. Wesley acknowledged the problem but attributed it to "growing pains" and concluded that "in the end, however, I think Gamma was satisfied with the outcome." Wesley must have been right, because he maintained his post as grand grammateus, and McCard became the grand sire archon at that meeting. The two then proceeded with alacrity to expand the fraternity further. Wesley retained his position as grand grammateus for two decades, until his death in 1929.[19]

It should be pointed out that Gamma's complaint, though resolved in the best interest of the fraternity, concerned an issue that lies at the heart of the tradition of expanding membership in the Boulé. Indeed, the arguments of the archons of Gamma can be traced back to the first expansion of the Boulé. Minton and Jackson's involvement in the creation of Beta Boulé is of major importance, because it set the pattern for the establishment of member boulés and the election of new archons throughout the history of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity.

From the beginning, the fraternity was based on the idea that it would elect only men of superior qualifications and that all members would be equal. No one could apply for membership, and only individuals whom all members of the fraternity had approved could be considered. The establishment of Delta

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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Boulé had broken that rule. Many might consider this selection process oppressive and overly restrictive, but it served an important purpose. The process of setting up new boulés or electing new archons was meant to ensure that any member of Sigma Pi Phi who, for whatever reason, had to move from his home boulé to the jurisdiction of another boulé could be assured that the new group of archons would be his intellectual and social equals. Member boulés could also be assured that the transferred archon would not dilute their quality. From the beginning, the Boulé practiced quality control of its membership, and the archons jealously guarded that right.[20]

Thus, although there was some disquiet among the membership, when Sigma Pi Phi convened for its third Grand Boulé in Chicago in 1911, it could report good progress on both major fronts that had bedeviled it in 1909. The appointed committee had submitted an application for a charter on August 11, 1911, which had been accepted by the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. And, in keeping with its determination to expand to new cities, the Boulé announced that in 1910 and 1911 it had established two new boulés, Delta in Memphis, Tennessee, and Epsilon in Washington, D.C. Further, at the 1911 meeting the Grand Boulé determined that the fraternity needed an official organ to communicate with member archons. In response, the delegates established the *Boulé Journal*, which began publication in 1912.

In its first issue, the *Boulé Journal* announced that "it is the desire of the Grand Boulé to extend to all members of the fraternity the heartiest felicitations upon the character and promise of this body." Except for a brief hiatus caused entirely by external forces, it has continued to do so over the life of Sigma Pi Phi. Of some significance, the delegates at the 1911 Grand Boulé elected William C. McCard grand sire archon. He would serve in that post until 1919, thus making him the longest serving grand sire archon of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity.[21]

When the Grand Boulé convened for its fourth session in Washington, D.C., in 1913, two additional boulés, Zeta in New York City and Eta in St. Louis, Missouri, had been added to the fold, both in 1912. W. E. B. DuBois, the distinguished scholar and a founder of the recently established NAACP, a national civil rights organization, was a charter member of Zeta Boulé. The organizers went on to establish boulés in Kansas City (1915) and Detroit (1917) to complete the expansion of the pre–World War I period.[22] The members had responded to the pleas of the founder, and Sigma Pi Phi was well on the way to national prominence.

The 1915 Grand Boulé in Nashville, Tennessee, was an extremely impor-

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tant and fruitful one. Grand Sire Archon William C. McCard opened it with a speech in which he challenged the Boulé to take an active interest in the affairs of the world and especially in matters that affected the lives of African Americans. He pointed out that it had become "more and more patent that Sigma Pi Phi must do something more than have a swell time, if we are to be lasting." He further observed that "we all recognize our duty to society; and as before stated, the Grand Boulé has long since recognized that we must determine a serious policy." This theme would be a recurring one for Boulé leadership throughout the life of the organization. Some archons wanted an activist organization, while others maintained that the social emphasis was enough. The issue was heated in some member boulés and even resulted in some resignations and delinquencies among those in the minority at a given time. It was not formally resolved until much later. Nonetheless, in 1915, the Grand Boulé did establish a Committee on Public Welfare to keep the fraternity informed of major issues and established an annual budget of $10 to pay for the committee's activities. The Grand Boulé further signaled its intent to take an activist position when it established a committee of three, chaired by Minton, to draft a plan of social and political action for the whole fraternity, and by its decision to award an annual college scholarship for a deserving young person. The Grand Boulé had stepped out onto the road to activism, but the journey was far from complete.[23]

The Grand Boulé in 1915 took two other significant actions: it refused to authorize the establishment of a member boulé in Los Angeles, and it passed a "sense of the Grand Boulé" resolution that any archon who offered his resignation in a subordinate boulé should be expelled. The delegates affirmed that "an offer to resign should be considered sufficient grounds for expulsion." The business thus completed, the archons scheduled the next meeting for Memphis, Tennessee, in 1917.[24]

The war years were a difficult period for the Boulé. Some of the decisions of the grand officers and the executive committee during those years further tested the young organization. Between the meeting in 1915 and the scheduled meeting in Memphis, the war in Europe heated up considerably and affected normal travel and other activities, especially after the United States became a combatant. The government called for a halt of nonessential travel, and the inflation in the cost of goods and services was enormous. Both had a significant impact on Sigma Pi Phi fraternity. In addition, racial tensions increased, and some major race riots occurred in northern cities, one of the most significant of which was in East St. Louis, Illinois, in 1917. These events further isolated African Americans.

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Those developments caused the executive committee to cancel the 1917 meeting of the Grand Boulé in Memphis and limited the publication of the *Boulé Journal.* Both occurrences caused major disruptions for the fraternity.

Archons from Delta Boulé in Memphis, and their supporters, protested mightily against the decision to cancel the 1917 meeting and were hardly mollified when the group decided to hold its first postwar meeting in Philadelphia in 1919. Members in Memphis complained that they had gone to great expense to prepare to entertain the Boulé and that they had not been given timely notice of the cancellation. Further, archons of Delta remembered the loudly voiced opposition to the formation of their boulé in the first place. This change in location, to them, was simply part of the same snub.

Considerable disquiet had also developed among the membership over the publication of the *Boulé Journal.* Shortly after the nation went to war, the cost of paper and printing escalated considerably, and the grand grapter determined that he could not produce a journal that met Boulé standards with the funds available. But because of loud and broad objections by some of the archons, the grand grapter reversed his decision and published an issue that he could afford. That was when the trouble really started. The same archons who had insisted that there be a publication now joined in full-throated condemnation of the grapter and other grand officers for producing a journal that did not meet Boulé standards. The grand grapter did not attempt to publish another issue until after the war was over.[25]

While wrestling with this internal squabbling, the leaders of the fraternity also had to deal with sniping from outsiders. The grand sire archon's report cited numerous efforts by the public, both blacks and whites, to tarnish the Boulé. Some critics claimed that the Boulé was trying to take over the school system and thus control public education, while others attempted to blame the fraternity for the controversy over efforts to reorganize Howard University. The Associated Press carried stories that blamed the Boulé for fomenting the race riots in northern cities during the war and shortly thereafter; in fact, one piece claimed that the Boulé was an abbreviation for the Bolsheviks. Though the accusations were untrue, they caused quite a stir for the Boulé and its officers.[26]

Despite the difficult times, the delegates at the 1919 meeting conducted some important business. In two seemingly contradictory actions, the Grand Boulé reaffirmed its social action interest when it established the Standing Committee on Public Welfare, concerned with "the social, economic and legal problems confronting the people of our race throughout the country, and particularly in cities containing boulés," yet agreed that, when it came to civic

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affairs, the members should "confine themselves to the original spirit of the organization, as laid down by the constitution." The Grand Boulé in 1919 also witnessed a singular occurrence: Harry H. Pace of Delta Boulé became grand sire archon after Alexander L. Turner of Iota Boulé drew the lot but declined to serve.[27]

This first postwar meeting of the Grand Boulé ended with some major issues still confronting the organization. The archons had to determine how much to expand the fraternity's membership, by adding both new boulés and new members to existing boulés; how to elect the grand sire archon, and the length of his term; how to deal with the matter of public policy and social action; and how to define the bond of brotherhood.

The response on the first matter was decisive, quick, and effective. Between 1919 and 1926, the Grand Boulé established eleven additional member boulés, for a total of twenty-one. This was the period of the most extensive expansion—in terms of more than doubling the number of boulés—in the fraternity's history (although in the 1980s, the actual number of newly chartered boulés was higher). Kappa Boulé in Atlanta (1920) and Xi Boulé in Los Angeles (1921), were among these new boulés, thus expanding Sigma Pi Phi fraternity well into the Deep South and all the way to the West Coast.

The problem for the Grand Boulé was that it accomplished this expansion against major opposition. Some archons strenuously and vociferously opposed creating new boulés or expanding the membership in existing ones. In fact, in large part because of such opposition, between 1926 and 1938, no new boulés were established, and few boulés took in new members. Membership in the Boulé grew at such a slow rate that report after report of grand sire archons and grand grammatei lamented that it would be difficult for the fraternity to sustain itself unless it engaged in vigorous growth. Member boulés expressed the same sentiments. One boulé in Cleveland, Ohio, said, "Lambda has stopped growing and has apparently reached a premature senility with approaching decay," and Epsilon in Washington, D.C., found that its "ranks have been thinned in the later stages of its pilgrimage." Yet, it continued, "with fresh and vigorous replacements . . . it quickened its faltering steps and marched again in the van of Sigma Pi Phi."[28] The fraternity ended the long hiatus when the Grand Boulé chartered Phi Boulé at Montgomery and Tuskegee, Alabama, in 1938.

The chartering of Phi Boulé incensed some archons who were opposed to any expansion. James B. Cashin of Beta Boulé expressed intense opposition to the creation of new boulés, and three boulés (Zeta in New York City, Omicron in Minneapolis–St. Paul, and Eta in St. Louis) endorsed Cashin's position,

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though his own boulé did not. In a letter published in the *Boulé Journal*, Cashin demanded that the grand sire archon appoint a "special Committee of Investigation" concerning what he called "the campaign for expansion."

Grand Sire Archon William A. Bell declined to appoint the committee and instead reaffirmed his conviction that the Boulé should continue to admit new members and create new boulés. He emphasized that it was his intention "to record with definiteness the steadfast and studied conviction that Sigma Pi Phi should grow." Bell said that there were numerous men throughout the country who, if admitted to the fraternity, "would be an honor to it and who would prove worthy comrades in our distinguished brotherhood." It is ironic and noteworthy that Cashin became grand sire archon in 1948 and presided over the creation of two new member boulés. Yet despite Cashin's conversion, or at least his acceptance of the inevitable, the struggle over expansion would continue within Sigma Pi Phi for decades.[29]

Just as the Grand Boulé was bedeviled by the issue of expansion, it also struggled with the issue of how to select the grand sire archon. In 1919, Kelly Miller proposed a constitutional amendment that would end the selection of the grand sire archon by lot and have him elected by ballot. Two factors drove the effort to change the manner of election. One was that despite the concept of equality among the members, some thought that selection by lot did not always put the best people into the leadership positions. Writing on this matter in the *Boulé Journal* in 1923, Charles E. Bentley wondered whether "we are willing to risk the judgment of men such as we have in place in office, men of proven ability, as tried executives to shape the destinies of such a group, rather than trusting to the hap-hazard uncertain method of picking a piece of paper from a hat?"[30] He was concerned that the lot system would result in the election of men who were incompetent, inexperienced, and possibly unwilling to perform their duties. Second, many believed that the lot was a farce and that the winner had already been determined by a small group in some fashion beforehand. The fact that founder Henry Minton had chosen the lot as sire archon of Alpha Boulé and also as the first grand sire archon substantiated this belief, regardless of how deserving such an outcome was.

Other questions about the election of the grand sire archon centered on the length of his term. This was a particularly touchy issue after World War I, given that William McCard had served as grand sire archon since 1911. As in the case of Minton, it is highly unlikely that McCard just happened to pick the right lot in 1911, 1913, and again in 1915. The mystery surrounding the selection process disappeared in 1929 when the Grand Boulé "elected" (that is, by

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acclamation rather than sortition) Carroll N. Langston for a second term, and in 1935, Wilbur C. Gordon was reelected.

Also in 1935, the Grand Boulé passed a constitutional amendment that limited candidates for grand sire archon to archons who had attended at least two Grand Boulés before the one at which they were elected. The delegates had taken the same action in 1933 at the previous Grand Boulé in Chicago, but the resolution had gotten lost and had never been implemented. Yet it is clear that a conflict between constitutional policy and the actual results of the lot system continued. In 1937, W. A. Bell was selected grand sire archon by lot at his first Grand Boulé. It happened again in 1952 when S. Tanner Stafford of Alpha Zeta (chartered in Tallahassee, Florida, in 1951) chose the lot in the first Grand Boulé that his member boulé was eligible to attend. Matters got even worse in 1954 when George W. Gore, also of Alpha Zeta, was selected.[31] This led many archons to discuss whether it might be preferable to elect the grand sire archon by ballot.

While it grappled with such matters, the Grand Boulé continued to work to put its house in order and to clarify the meaning of brotherhood for the members. One matter was the financial solvency of the fraternity. Thus, it was with joy that the grand thesauristes reported at the Grand Boulé in 1921 that the organization had completed the biennium without a deficit, the first time ever. It would remain solvent from that point forward.

As the 1920s drew to a close, the Boulé approached its quarter-century anniversary. In a statement in preparation for the Grand Boulé in 1929, the *Boulé Journal* emphasized that the Boulé was a graduate fraternity whose members had already "made a name for themselves in the regard of mankind." Further:

> Sigma Pi Phi, as a fraternity of this type has not only persisted, but has gathered into its organization a remarkable group of men. There is scarcely a single type of outstanding group activity, in which we will not find one or more Archons occupying positions of leadership. This, of course, is not a matter of boasting but it is a matter of that kind of pride that finds its satisfaction in realizing that the fraternity has been able to gather into its circle men of the highest type and that it has been able to retain their loyalty, and that through association, it has been able to face them not only with a zeal for personal growth of mind and spirit but also with a willingness to render large services, by virtue of their fine gifts, to those who need their help.[32]

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The grand grapter's editorial proved prophetic, because the Grand Boulé that convened in Columbus, Ohio, that summer did so with great expectations and some trepidation. Despite the fact that the fraternity was in the best financial shape of its history, the economic situation was worsening for the nation. No one could foresee how bad it would become, but there were clearly signs to worry about. In any event, given its own new financial muscle, the Grand Boulé made its first effort to provide some compensation for two of its officers when it voted to pay a $500 annual honorarium to the grand grammateus and the grand grapter. Though hardly adequate compensation for their work, the decision marked the fraternity's recognition of its responsibility and helped place it on a sound business footing. This meeting also witnessed a sad event when it was reported that all the members of Mu Boulé in Wichita, Kansas, had either died or moved from the city. Thus, the Grand Boulé withdrew Mu's charter, marking the first time that a member boulé had become defunct.[33]

The Grand Boulé in 1929 also wrangled with the issues of who should be eligible to attend Boulé affairs and, more important, how to emphasize the essentiality of brotherhood among archons. The second issue took center stage because of a nasty argument that had developed between two groups of archons, and their respective boulés, that threatened to tarnish the organization's image and sense of unity.

The argument was between W. E. B. DuBois and James Weldon Johnson of the NAACP, on the one side, and Robert L. Vann, publisher of the *Pittsburgh Courier,* on the other. By the time the dispute finally came before the Grand Boulé, it had been festering for more than three years. At the heart of the dispute was an incident that had occurred in 1925: African American physician Ossian Sweet and members of his family had been arrested and charged with the murder of a white man. The man had died when the Sweets fired into a crowd of whites who were marching on their home in an attempt to evict them from the previously all-white neighborhood in Detroit. The NAACP reacted quickly to provide a defense for the Sweets and went to extraordinary lengths to raise the large sum of money required. The association hired famed trial lawyer Clarence Darrow of Chicago to head the defense team and received generous grants from the public and several foundations, particularly the American Fund for Public Service (commonly known as the Garland Fund), on whose board Johnson served. In the end, the NAACP raised more money than required for the Sweet case, and the residual became the basis for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.[34]

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The dispute among the archons developed when a series of articles in the *Pittsburgh Courier* in October 1926 accused the leaders of the NAACP, especially DuBois and Johnson, of misusing the funds that had been raised for the defense of the Sweets. The NAACP officials reacted with outrage, and in a widely disseminated press release, Johnson accused the *Courier*'s publisher, Robert Vann, of using his paper to enrich himself at the expense of black people and black organizations. Vann was, in Johnson's words, a "liability" to his race. In particular, NAACP officials cited Vann's opposition to the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters that A. Philip Randolph had founded. Over the years, the two sides pilloried each other in correspondence and before other audiences.[35]

The Grand Executive Committee had wrestled with the matter in 1927 and had reported to the delegates at the Grand Boulé that year that the issue had been resolved. Representatives of Zeta Boulé, the home boulé of Johnson and DuBois, rejected that decision by the executive committee and during the next two years continued to demand that the matter come before the full Grand Boulé, which it did in 1929.[36]

The DuBois-Johnson-Vann matter was troubling for the Boulé for several reasons. The public standing of the principals was one reason. But for the fraternity, which was still an extremely small and intimate organization in 1929, the strains of the debate threatened to turn friend against friend and thus rend the organization. Indeed, the debate on the floor of the convention was heated, as member after member resisted the efforts of the leadership to put the issue into a committee and keep it off the floor. As a result, the delegates of the Boulé convened as a committee of the whole and fully debated the matter and its potential impact on Sigma Pi Phi. In the end, they brokered an agreement between DuBois and Vann by which Vann denied personal involvement in or prior knowledge of the publication of the articles, and DuBois accepted his apology and agreed that the matter was over. Johnson declined to sign the agreement. Nonetheless, after a loud and enthusiastic response to a firm handshake between Vann and DuBois, the Grand Boulé considered the matter closed and determined that if the parties did not stop fighting, the executive committee would "request such boulé in which such Archon is a member to demand the pin [and] resignation of such Archon from his boulé."[37]

As on most issues, the archons made the best of a difficult situation; the Grand Boulé used the dispute to redefine and restate its meaning of brotherhood. Writing in the *Boulé Journal*, Grand Grapter George F. David described what had happened at Columbus:

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> Now the striking truth in connection with this forceful and memorable utterance is that it came in the most effective way; it grew out of a life situation. It was not a studied abstraction, emanating from the minds of Boulé philosophers; it was no finely spun theory, beautiful for contemplation, but impracticable, when applied to the vexing problems that arise out of our relationship toward each other; it was not the result of an attempt of any kind away and apart from a real situation, to define a merely idealistic principle.
>
> The utterance of the Grand Boulé has all of the simplicity of a fundamental principle. It is earnest, straightforward, unequivocal. In so many words it says this: first of all every Archon is a gentleman, or he has no business in the Boulé. He will, therefore, at all times and in all situations conduct himself as a gentleman; he cannot do less. He will realize, or at least assume, that every other Archon along with himself is a gentleman; and therefore in all his social, business, political and religious relationships, subscribes to and practices the same high principles to which he is committed. This assumption will therefore make it impossible for one Archon unjustly and viciously to attack another one even when he is in possession of facts sufficient to justify the attack. As brothers in the same circle, it would be his business to present his findings to the Boulé and let them deal with the apostasy from the spirit of the fraternity. Archons may, and should differ; they will, and should be subject to criticism in their public life, by any other Archon who disagrees with the program or procedures involved. But this has nothing to do with vicious personal attack that questions the honor and high standing of a fellow Archon. This is outside of the pale of the fundamental elements of "brotherhood."[38]

Though it reestablished and clarified the fraternity's principle of brotherhood, this fine statement caused little change in Vann's attitude toward DuBois, and especially toward Johnson. When Johnson died in an automobile accident in 1938, Vann was still angry. Archon Walter White, who succeeded Johnson at the NAACP, wrote to Vann to encourage him to attend Johnson's funeral as a show of respect and unity of black leadership. In response, Vann wrote to White: "You know, Walter, I must be frank about this. . . . Jim and I were not friends when he died, and had not been friends for some time. I have never forgiven him for the way he treated me over my difference with the NAACP. . . . And so I say about his funeral the same thing I said about Huey Long's funeral—

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'I shall not be present but I am glad it happened.'"[39] So much for fraternal brotherhood.

Vann's obvious anger notwithstanding, it is true that the archons, both those at the assembly and others throughout the country, endorsed the principle of brotherhood as set forth by the Grand Boulé. Further, they emphasized their intention to make every effort to ensure that once a man was initiated an archon, he would remain an archon. The Grand Boulé, full of this renewed spirit of brotherhood, established the principle that an archon who was dropped for nonpayment of dues could be reinstated by payment of arrears, but it pointed out that such payment must be sent "together with a statement of the continued good character of the Archon [and] that he be reestablished."[40]

The archons' endorsement of and commitment to the ideals of brotherhood were manifest in the quarter-century commemoration. In celebration of the fraternity's twenty-fifth anniversary, Alpha Boulé organized a party and invited all archons to attend. On December 27, 1929, archons from six member boulés gathered with their wives, daughters, and female friends for a sumptuous banquet and two days of celebration. The affair, over which Henry M. Minton presided as toastmaster, was replete with commemorative remarks and other expressions of the delight its members took in the fraternity and in their achievements over the past twenty-five years. Indeed, the celebration was so successful that it established the tradition of annual Christmas parties by the member boulés and marked the beginning of the Boulé's affirmation that "Christmas is for the Archousai."

This was not the first time that Alpha had used its understanding of the meaning of the Boulé to establish an important precedent for the fraternity. Just five years earlier, at the twentieth anniversary of the founding of Sigma Pi Phi in May 1924, Alpha Boulé had "resolved that the May meeting of each year [should] be set apart as a memoriam to the deceased Archons, that the head be bowed in reverence, and that some form of tribute . . . be paid to their memory."[41] That action led to an annual observance for all member boulés.

By the time the Boulé celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary, the economic downturn had become a full-blown depression the likes of which Americans had never experienced. The impact of the Great Depression affected all sectors of American life, but unlike during the war, the Grand Boulé continued to hold its biennial meetings. The first two meeting in the 1930s were in northern cities—Pittsburgh in 1931, and Chicago in 1933. But 1935 marked the

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beginning of a series of meetings in the South, and Memphis, Tennessee, finally played host nearly two decades after the war forced the cancellation of its scheduled meeting in 1917. The gathering in 1935 at LeMoyne College also marked the first time that the Grand Boulé convened on a college campus. It would do so on numerous future occasions.

When the archons of the Grand Boulé met at Atlanta University as the guests of Kappa Boulé in 1937, the impact of the Great Depression was beginning to be felt by the Boulé. At the 1935 meeting, the Grand Boulé had considered the weight of the depression on its members and slashed the annual grand tax by two-thirds, from $3 to $1, thus reducing available funds considerably. The fraternity's resources were further strained by losses caused by the failure of banks in which it had deposits. Midway through the biennium, the Grand Executive Committee reviewed the impact of the bank failures and the tax cut on the fraternity's funds and rescinded the tax cut for the second year of the biennium, billing member boulés at the previous rate of $3 per archon. The committee's decision enabled the organization to meet its obligations and helped maintain its no-deficit position. The grand officers and committee members were delighted that only two member boulés objected to the rescinding of the tax cut, but even they, in time, paid at the new rate.[42]

The Grand Boulé in Atlanta was important in many ways. As already mentioned, the delegates at Atlanta addressed the method of selection and term of office of the grand sire archon. They also adopted a policy on who could attend affairs sponsored by the Grand Boulé or member boulés. The policy was changed such that "attendance at social functions officially under the supervision of the Grand Boulé or any local boulé shall be restricted to Archons, their wives, their unmarried sons and daughters living within their household, other female relatives, or female friends, provided that no married female be invited whose husband is not an Archon. Unmarried widows of deceased Archons are eligible to be present at all social functions."[43] In addition to establishing the attendance policy, the Grand Boulé in Atlanta took the important symbolic step of recognizing the preeminence of Henry M. Minton in the pantheon of Boulé leadership, electing him grand sire archon emeritus.[44]

The Grand Boulé met next at West Virginia State College in Charleston, and in 1941, it convened for the first time on the West Coast when Xi in Los Angeles hosted the meeting. By the time the Grand Boulé gathered in California, all of Europe and most of Asia were engulfed in World War II. France had been overrun by German forces, and England was almost alone in trying to prevent Germany's total domination of Europe. The United States was also on

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a war footing, and ominous signs about the nation's future were everywhere. The Grand Boulé conducted its business, selected Emmett J. Scott grand sire archon for the 1941–1943 biennium, and scheduled its next meeting for Baltimore in 1943.

In retrospect, the selection of Scott seems providential, because less than four months after the conclusion of the Grand Boulé, Japan attacked U.S. forces at Pearl Harbor, and the nation was at war. Scott, who had served as special assistant to the secretary of war for Negro affairs during World War I, seemed the ideal man to have at the helm of the fraternity during this time. The Boulé did not meet during World War II, and it required all of Scott's skills, and those of his colleagues on the executive committee, to keep the fraternity moving forward in the absence of meetings. The hiatus lasted from 1941 to 1946, and the fraternity bumped along near bottom during those years.

World War II took a major toll on the Boulé. Severe budgetary constraints led to infrequent publication of the *Boulé Journal,* and members lost contact with one another and with the grand officers. Local boulés reported infrequent and poorly attended meetings. Though times were difficult and there had been much grumbling among the members, all had not been lost during the war. Indeed, in June 1944 the Grand Boulé welcomed a new link in its chain when it set aside Alpha Gamma Boulé in Berkeley, California.

After the invasion of Europe by Allied forces on D-day in June 1944, Scott began to speak optimistically about holding a meeting in Baltimore in 1945, but by early 1945, it had been determined that the earliest possible meeting date was the summer of 1946. Finally, in December 1945, Scott announced that the Grand Boulé would meet at Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland, in August 1946.[45] This decision had a permanent impact on the Grand Boulé: although it would continue to meet biennially, it would now meet in even-numbered rather than odd-numbered years.

When the archons and archousai convened in Baltimore, it was clearly a different world. Allied forces had vanquished Hitler's Germany, thus saving Western Europe from Nazi domination. Japan had also been defeated, and in bringing this about, the United States had ushered in a new era of atomic weapons. A major new force, the Soviet Union, ruled in Eastern Europe. Domestically, there were signs—though still unclear—that U.S. policy on race would change too. The world would never be the same again.

The grand sire archon pointedly recognized those changes in his address and challenged the Boulé to respond to them. Scott told the archons that they could not continue to keep quiet as the world turned:

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> I have spoken to little effect if I have not challenged you to enlist, with flaming sword and stout heart, and come to grips with the tyrannies and injustices which seek to dehumanize and oppress the racial group to which we belong. The time has come for us continually, aggressively and intelligently to assault the citadels of oppression and secure for the 13,000,000 colored Americans of the United States, in fullness and completeness, their civil and political rights, and every privilege and opportunity enjoyed by the rest of the peoples of this country—We archons of Sigma Pi Phi are, as I trust we shall be, a part of this eternal struggle to establish justice in America and throughout this world—Sigma Pi Phi has withstood the shock of two world wars—In a tough and disorganized world we have stood steadfast. We have not been; we are not exhibitionists. We know our membership is composed of archons of intellectual honesty, moral courage and leadership—a leadership generally and generously recognized.[46]

Far from having "spoken to little effect," Scott's speech in 1946 was just one in a series of challenges to the Boulé from outstanding archons to extend its membership and to do more publicly to improve society. These challenges from critics within the fraternity were far more fruitful than those from outsiders. As early as 1913, Grand Sire Archon McCard had challenged the fraternity to take responsibility for its place in society. In a widely discussed speech that he delivered at the Grand Boulé in Wilberforce, Ohio, in 1948, W. E. B. DuBois lambasted Sigma Pi Phi for its do-nothing posture. Already eighty years old and a charter member of Zeta Boulé since 1912, the distinguished scholar and civil rights leader saw little that the organization had contributed to the advancement of African Americans. Initially, the archons paid little attention to DuBois, and some actually ostracized him for his audacious comments. According to Charles Wesley, "We of the Boulé had left him alone in his demonstrative criticism." Nonetheless, DuBois's words had struck a chord within the fraternity. Indeed, at the next Grand Boulé in Alabama in 1950, the Committee on National Policy and Action reported that Sigma Pi Phi "should definitely declare its self in its attitude on and toward the great social, governmental and moral questions, which are today of supreme concern to the race, to the nation, and to our world."[47]

In 1951, DuBois accepted the chairmanship of the Peace Information Center and almost landed in federal prison. According to the U.S. attorney general, the Peace Information Center handled publicity for the World Congress of the Defenders of Peace, which Secretary of State Dean Acheson considered

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a purveyor of Soviet propaganda. DuBois refused the government's demand that he resign or register as an agent of a "foreign principal" and was indicted. The government failed to prove the case, and a federal judge acquitted DuBois. DuBois was bitter about the lack of support during his ordeal and complained that neither African American leaders nor "a fraternity to which I have belonged for almost forty years" did anything to help him.[48]

It should be clear that the ostracism of DuBois did not stop the flow of commentary from critics. Indeed, significant changes in national policy heightened the demand and enthusiasm to involve the Boulé in the civil rights movement. Among those policy changes were the Supreme Court's unanimous decision in *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), which outlawed racial segregation in public schools; highly publicized integration efforts, such as those in Little Rock, Arkansas, in which archons took major leadership roles; and the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955–1956, which launched the career of Archon Martin Luther King Jr.

In 1958, in a remarkably insightful and powerful speech on the importance of the Boulé and the challenges it faced, Archon Alonzo J. Moron, president of Hampton Institute in Virginia, was biting in his criticism and in his insistence for action. Speaking at the Grand Boulé that convened on his campus, Moron said:

> It is a sobering note to observe, however, that we have no exclusive claim to all of the outstanding men of quality and achievement of the Negro race in the United States. It may not be a statistical accident that we do not now number among our active membership all, or even a majority, of those who are, or have been, at the forefront of the fight for equal rights and justice in our country. Those of us who feel keenly the need for united effort and sustained sacrifice in the continuing fight to make democracy live for all of us are concerned that Sigma Pi Phi has provided no leadership and scant support for the fight against the denial of equal opportunity on the basis of race, color or creed.[49]

There were, of course, archons who were outstanding leaders of the civil rights movement, including DuBois and Johnson early in the century and King, who was Moron's contemporary. But Moron had struck a note of truth that recognized the continued opposition to public action. Some archons even objected to supporting the NAACP.

Indeed, at the 1958 meeting, the members had to resolve a major dispute

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between the Grand Boulé and Eta Boulé concerning the powers of the former over the member boulés. At its 1956 meeting in Washington, D.C., the Grand Boulé, by a vote of forty-five to six, had passed a tax of $2 per archon to pay for the Boulé's life membership in the NAACP. All subordinate boulés except Eta paid the tax without comment. Eta claimed that the tax was unconstitutional and refused to pay, and the executive committee suspended Eta. Eta did not go quietly and asked the Grand Boulé to hear its case and lift the suspension; it even developed a set of "principles" to justify its position. The outcome was that the Grand Boulé overturned the executive committee's suspension and agreed that "Eta would accept voluntarily the action of the Grand Boulé in levying the tax and join voluntarily all other boulés in supporting the NAACP life membership program of the fraternity."[50] In short, they cut a deal that saved the fraternity from further rancor and permitted it to support the civil rights initiative.

Conditions and circumstances were developing rapidly in the United States that would cause the Boulé to continue to develop its position on social action. Originally, the Grand Boulé had been scheduled to meet in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1964 and in New York City in 1966. However, the cities swapped dates to give the archons and their families the opportunity to attend the World's Fair in New York in 1964, and in the hope that the extra two years would find desegregated facilities in Nashville.

The 1960s was without doubt one of the most exciting periods in the history of the United States. It was a decade that began with the youngest man ever elected president replacing the oldest man who had ever held that job, and it seemed that the new president would infuse the nation with his own seemingly unlimited vigor. John F. Kennedy generated excitement and gave the nation a sense of movement, and the people loved it. They even applauded monumental blunders, such as the ill-fated invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. And although they shuddered at the prospect of an atomic holocaust during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, they admired the president's courage and determination during those trying days and showered him with adulation when the crisis had passed. When an assassin's bullet ended President Kennedy's life just before Thanksgiving 1963, the nation wrapped him in martyrdom and vowed to move on toward the new world that he had envisioned.

Black Americans were no less excited about the prospects of the time, and in fact, they held the key to what would make the 1960s the people's decade. Even before Kennedy became president, young blacks throughout the South had initiated what would become the civil rights movement. They felt that they were on the verge of "facing the rising sun of a new day begun," which

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Archon James Weldon Johnson had prophesied decades before in a poem commonly called the "Negro National Anthem." Before the decade was over, the civil rights movement would test the fiber of the nation as no other domestic event had done since the Civil War.

The times were filled with possibilities, but blacks would see their hopes and expectations dashed in a rash of murders, deceit, war, and the benign neglect of the Nixon White House. To be sure, by the end of the decade, a few fortunate blacks, through a combination of luck, talent, and hard work, had moved into prestigious positions, some sitting at the highest levels of American government. But the masses of blacks were still overrepresented in low-paying jobs and on unemployment rolls; they still occupied wretched housing, and the income gap between white and black families had widened. The only real change was that for the first time, at least in law, the United States had become aggressively antiracist.

The actions of working-class blacks had been directly responsible for the legislation overturning states' rights to practice racial discrimination. To be sure, several major organizations and exceptional individuals—Martin Luther King Jr. unequaled among them—made outstanding contributions to the effort to rid the nation of racism. But in the end, the sufferings of working-class blacks in the rural and urban South, people whose names we will never know, stirred the consciousness of the nation and made it possible for the civil rights movement to succeed. All the proclamations, negotiations, and pleas of black spokesmen would have been in vain had not the masses poured into the streets to demonstrate to white Americans that black people were determined to have equal rights.

The civil rights movement lasted only a few years; no more than half a decade passed between the sit-in at a Woolworth's department store in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1960 and the explosion of violence in Watts, a section of Los Angeles, in 1965. But between those two events—one beginning the civil rights movement, and the other emphatically showing that it was over and that a new movement had begun—thousands of blacks (and liberal whites, too) waged an unrelenting, nonviolent war against legal racial discrimination. On an August afternoon in 1963, King mesmerized thousands of people gathered in the capital for the massive March on Washington. Young John L. Lewis, president of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and a future archon, also spoke eloquently there that afternoon, though the elders would not let him read the speech that he had prepared because of its stinging criticism of the administration.

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Congress seemed no less mesmerized than the common citizenry. Early the next spring, the House of Representatives passed by a wide margin the most far-reaching civil rights bill in the history of the United States. Even more amazing, for the first time in its history, the Senate voted cloture to end a filibuster against a civil rights measure and passed the bill as well. With great fanfare, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on July 2 of that year, prohibiting discrimination based on race, sex, or national origin. Congress quickly followed with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Indeed, it seemed that there was no limit to the nation's desire to create equality for all. The United States had become a society with no legal racial barriers, but much remained to be done to make that an actuality.

The forces that had wrought such significant changes in the nation's government had affected other organizations, the Boulé among them. Accordingly, when members of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity convened for the Grand Boulé in New York City in 1964, they faced numerous challenges from both within and without. At the Boulé's sixtieth anniversary meeting, its members were left to determine whether they should make changes as well.

Archons and archousai heard a thundering yes to that question quite early in the session. Percy L. Julian, in a speech entitled "Faultless Prophets," used the usually somber memorial service to join the sagacious critics and issue the clearest challenge to the old order that the Boulé had heard since Moron's speech six years earlier. In one remarkable passage, the distinguished scientist said:

> I cannot comprehend the remotest possibility that the noble men of Sigma Pi Phi, whose position is that of scholar, will continue to defame the sacred memory of our beloved forebears, by sitting on our inherited stools of intellectual eminence and merely watching the streams go by. Make no mistake about it. This is largely what we are doing. Our policy of non-identification, as a body, with any national activity, means our non-endorsement and our non-participation. This attitude on the part of the fraternity is contagious, and the result is that few of our members individually become publicly active and sacrificially active in movements that mean our survival as a strong closely-knit element in American affairs.[51]

Julian was hardly finished. In scathing terms he compared the archons to the Floogie-boo, a mythical bird who flies backward because he is more concerned about where he has been than where he is going. Julian then pushed on to the matters that troubled the Boulé most—growth and public action. On

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the former, Julian asked, "are we not a sorry collection of so-called scholars when we have absolutely no organization seeking out and encouraging talent that might follow us?" Referring to his "beloved fraternity" as a "society of snobs . . . hiding behind our facade of scholarly respectability," Julian insisted that the Boulé must become involved in the great matters of the day. "I submit to you that scattered individual activity is not enough," he said, and seemed to lament that "the time has come—indeed it has almost gone by—for collective programming and action."[52]

The response to Julian's speech was testimony to how far both the times and the fraternity had come. Unlike in 1948, when the members had excoriated and ostracized DuBois for saying the same things, archons received Julian's speech as a rallying cry to build an even stronger Sigma Pi Phi fraternity. Though change was slow to come within the Boulé, things were never the same after that 1964 meeting in New York.[53]

Julian's challenge, heaped on the backs of those of Minton, McCard, Scott, DuBois, Moron, and other critics over the decades, began to pay off. Between 1964 and 1970, thoughtful leaders radically remade the Grand Boulé but always remained committed to the principles on which the fraternity had been founded. At its meeting in Nashville in 1966, the Boulé instituted its first far-reaching change by amending the constitution to establish the office of grand sire archon–elect, chosen by lot. James E. Anderson of Wichita drew that lot in Nashville and became the first grand sire archon–elect. As time would tell, he would also be the last grand sire archon to be chosen by lot.

The group in Nashville dealt with two other important matters. Since 1962, some archons, especially those in the West, had advocated dividing the Boulé into regions so that members in outlying areas would have an opportunity to get to know archons from boulés other than their own. The Grand Boulé provided $300 for a pilot project in the West. The second issue, first suggested in New York and formally proposed by Grand Sire Archon Oliver W. Hill in Nashville, was the establishment of a Boulé Foundation. The Grand Boulé took no formal action on that subject in Nashville, but it was clearly at the forefront of future Boulé activities.[54]

The 1968 meeting of the Grand Boulé highlighted the close relationship between the members of the Boulé and other African Americans. Further, it showed how much had changed in black America since the founding of the Sigma Pi Phi fraternity in 1904. There was no longer any question about the need for the Boulé to adapt.

The Grand Boulé was scheduled to convene at the end of July 1968 as the

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guests of Rho Boulé in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Members of Rho went about the business of preparing for the meeting, and it appeared that all was in place for the convocation. Then, on April 21, representatives of Rho—over some bitter opposition within the local boulé—informed Grand Grammateus George Redd that it would be inadvisable for the Grand Boulé to meet in Pittsburgh as planned and suggested that the meeting be canceled.[55]

This decision on the part of the Rho leadership was occasioned by external matters. Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act, much had changed in black America, especially in the northern urban areas, and especially between upper-class affluent blacks and the masses of those still mired in the ghettos. There had been numerous manifestations of this divide, including the shift from civil rights to Black Power by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee; the formation of the Black Panther Party and its emphasis on militant action for civil rights, as opposed to the civil disobedience that King had practiced; and the massive urban violence that tore numerous cities apart. The most recent riots had just occurred that April, following King's assassination in Memphis. Thousands of rioters wrought major destruction in many cities, including Washington, D.C., and Pittsburgh. Reports show that there was major destruction of black businesses and professional offices in the latter city and that upper-class blacks feared for their lives. Some of them, members of the Rho Boulé, thus considered it ill-advised to host a meeting of affluent blacks in tuxedos.

Though mindful of these events, the executive committee, rather than cancel the meeting, looked for another site. It found appropriate hotel space in Philadelphia, and Alpha Boulé was willing to serve as host on short notice. The grand sire archon appointed a special committee to investigate the conditions that had caused the cancellation of the Pittsburgh meeting, and the Grand Boulé convened in Philadelphia and carried out its business, but the mood was somber.

The investigating committee reported the existence of a major divide within black America. It found, in part:

> Unfortunately this Pittsburgh crisis brought out in sharp relief the absence of rapport between the older and younger or between traditionalists and revisionalists [*sic*], not only in the Black Community but within the individual Boulés of our organization. Tragic is the indisputable fact that the underprivileged of our group and their leaders discern no possible contribution to their efforts from us—the reputed talented tenth—and those who compose their programs and enunciate their aspirations.

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Thus we had in Pittsburgh a sharp and irreconcilable polarization between these two forces in the black community—the fruits of which were and are:

1. Fear on the part of Negro professionals for their personal safety and survival;
2. Consciousness of their weakness to serve as accepted leaders;
3. Anxiety that they might harm their image with established forces, leading to severe embarrassment and complete loss of voice in the shaping of events affecting their own futures;
4. Retreat from any possible public confrontation that might spark stronger demonstrations of hostility from those who feel no kinship to them, nor any bond of mutual understanding; The result: they gave up the Grand Boulé as the best way to avoid a possible unpleasant confrontation.[56]

The Pittsburgh debacle was a clarion call for Sigma Pi Phi to take control of its destiny. As the special committee's report urged, the leaders of the Boulé set out from Philadelphia determined that "without any sense of panic or harmful deviation from the original tenets of the Grand Boulé we can turn into profitable organizational assets [these] thrusts against middle-class professional Negroes, [such as] charges of fraternal inertia, lack of concern for the poor and the man in the ghetto, snobbishness, Ivory Tower dwellers and exclusiveness."[57]

The committee went on to make several recommendations that would help the Boulé meet its responsibilities to society and to itself:

1. Clarify, revise and reinforce the aims and objectives of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity.
2. Improve, modify and modernize the techniques and procedures of Archon selection and orientation.
3. Indicate and devise ways and means to enable subordinate Boulés to make Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity relevant to the problems of race, society and country in a way to involve and assert the innate leadership of the organization. It is further recommended that a National Committee be appointed, if advisable, to work to this end.
4. Invite the public to Grand Boulé meetings for information and values which the Grand Boulé has to offer.
5. Offer subordinate Boulés greater freedom, within the stated area of activity, to improve the image, attractiveness and values of Sigma Pi Phi.[58]

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The meeting in Philadelphia in 1968 was thus extraordinarily important for the Grand Boulé. The fraternity continued to wrestle with the method of electing the grand sire archon to ensure seasoned leadership, and it worked on the formulation of a program to make the work of the fraternity relevant to the problems of society, the race, and the country—for the first time, publicly "involving the leadership of Sigma Pi Phi in such problems and issues as they affect the surrounding community."[59]

In one striking event, the archons registered their final disgust with the system of electing the grand sire archon by lot. Members from the floor, under the leadership of Percy Julian and A. Leon Higginbotham, amended the constitution to remove any reference to a grand sire archon–elect, a post that had been instituted just two years earlier. They took such action to give the leadership time to resolve the matter at the next meeting. James E. Anderson, who had been chosen grand sire archon–elect in 1966, took office as grand sire archon for the 1968–1970 biennium.[60]

In the interim between the meeting in Philadelphia and the session in Miami in 1970, leaders of the fraternity worked hard to implement significant changes. Grand Grammateus Redd, along with Archon Percy Julian, were in the forefront of that movement.[61] They were effective, and when the Grand Boulé convened in Miami Beach, the reformers were in full control. They moved assuredly to put into place a structure that would result in significant changes for the organization and guarantee its growth and stability. The most significant action was that the Grand Boulé reestablished the office of grand sire archon–elect, but it pointedly determined that that officer would be elected by ballot, thus ending once and for all the selection of officers by lot. To complete the work, the Grand Boulé elected both a grand sire archon, Herbert T. Miller, and a grand sire archon–elect, J. Ernest Wilkins Jr. Further, the Miami meeting created the position of grand grammateus–executive secretary as its chief operating officer and established a central office for the Boulé in New York City. The archons also took the first formal action on establishing a regional system, a matter that was finally resolved in the constitution in 1972.[62]

The meeting in Miami took two important actions that would help stimulate the growth of the Boulé. It revised the constitution and guaranteed archons the right to transfer from one member boulé to another. More significantly, it removed the restrictive blackball, which had been used for years to keep nominees out of the fraternity. Many archons had grown weary of having the fraternity held hostage to a limited few. Thus, in 1970, they revised the constitution and established the one-third rule for rejecting a nominee for

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membership; the rule clearly required a negative vote of one-third of the active membership of the entire subordinate boulé, not just one-third of those present and voting. Sigma Pi Phi was thus a much different fraternity after the Miami meeting, although the commitment to "know the best of one another" remained at its center. And that was to the betterment of all concerned.[63]

The change in structure and the determination of Grand Sire Archon Herbert T. Miller to expand the Boulé were immediately effective. During the biennium of Miller's term, the Grand Boulé created six member boulés, three of them in the upper Midwest. This period of growth was preliminary to the explosive development of new boulés and enlarged membership that came in the 1980s.

Efforts to establish member boulés abroad also took place during this period; one such effort ended up being one of the saddest chapters in the history of Sigma Pi Phi. As early as 1967, the Grand Executive Committee had established an international expansion committee to consider the feasibility of creating subordinate boulés abroad, especially in Liberia, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. In December 1978, after more than a decade of concerted effort by several archons (particularly W. Beverly Carter, U.S. ambassador to Liberia), Grand Sire Archon Harvey C. Russell and Grand Grammateus Butler T. Henderson officiated at the setting apart of Beta Theta Boulé in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia in West Africa. Composed of some of the leading men of the country, including a number of high government officials, Beta Theta became the first boulé established on foreign soil. Boulé leadership celebrated the occasion and saw it as the harbinger of more extensive expansion abroad.

Soon after Beta Theta was established, a series of incidents of civil disobedience against the government led to riots and by 1980 resulted in an all-out civil rebellion. On April 12, 1980, the People's Redemption Council, under the leadership of Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, drove into the capital and invaded the presidential palace, where they assassinated President William R. Tolbert and later killed at least thirteen members of his cabinet and other highly placed members of Liberian society. This latter group included all the archons of Beta Theta except for one, A. Romeo Horton, who was out of the country on business.

*Jet Magazine* graphically described the anguish of the archons as they faced the firing squad. Two archons, it reported, stood tall until fired upon, but others either slumped or fainted in anticipation of their deaths. This act wiped out Beta Theta, and the Grand Boulé sadly withdrew its charter. Horton, the lone survivor, transferred his affiliation to Alpha Boulé, where he participated

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fully in the life of the fraternity and even served a term as sire archon. In 1996, the executive committee officially ended the sorrow over the Monrovia experience and reconnected the links of the fraternity's chain when it reassigned the Beta Theta charter to the new boulé in Knoxville, Tennessee.[64]

Despite the events in Monrovia, the leadership remained committed to expanding the Boulé and continued their efforts. Robert V. Franklin, who served as grand sire archon from 1982 to 1984 and then as chairman of the Growth and Expansion Committee, was the leader in this endeavor. Grand Sire Archon Theodore A. Jones (1980–1982) had set a fine record by initiating five boulés, but Franklin obliterated that record by creating sixteen new boulés during his term; he led in the establishment of six more as committee chairman. Grand Sire Archon Richard I. McKinney (1986–1988) established seven more.

The 1980s was the most prolific period of expansion in the history of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity. Together, the leaders set up thirty-seven new boulés, more than a third of the total number. At the end of the decade, the fraternity counted more than 3,000 members in ninety-seven member boulés. By 2003, as Sigma Pi Phi fraternity approached the century mark, there were more than 4,500 archons in 110 member boulés.[65]

Nor was there a decline in the quality of the men admitted. As Franklin reported, the expansion had "added substantially to the quality of men who form our Great Fraternity." In 1999, the last date for which there are comprehensive data, the membership of Sigma Pi Phi was still an older group of men, with a median age of nearly sixty-two years. Most, 98.5 percent, were or had been married, and 91.5 percent were residing with a spouse; 5.2 percent were separated or divorced, and 3.3 percent were widowed. They were financially successful men, with an average annual income of $150,000; about 5 percent earned over $500,000. High academic achievement was also the norm. All had at least a bachelor's degree, the minimum educational requirement for membership; in addition, 33.2 percent of the archons had master's degrees, 10.1 percent had MBAs, 1.8 percent held DMin degrees, 16.6 percent held PhD degrees, 14.9 percent had JD degrees, 7.2 percent were dentists with DDS or DMS degrees, and 18.3 percent, like the founders, held MD degrees. It was, indeed, a highly qualified group.[66]

These data, though showing the diversity and depth of membership—at least among professionally educated, elite African American males—also display the liberality with which member boulés choose archons. Some have argued that the Boulé selects only sons of old-line families, but this is not true.

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The rosters of member boulés contain numerous archons who are first-generation college graduates. In choosing such men, the Boulé has not lowered its quality, because it still insists on strict standards of excellence and congeniality. In his Memorial Service Address to the Grand Boulé in Miami in 1970, Archon Raymond Pace Alexander spoke to the point: "Sigma Pi Phi should chart new methods of communications between the poor and the affluent blacks for many among us, and I am not ashamed to admit that I am one, come from families much, much poorer and with much less education than 80% of the black boys and girls in American colleges today. How many in this room, and I am not ashamed to admit it, started his life as a bootblack or a Pullman porter and equally low employment."[67]

It is true that archons' sons and grandsons are members of the Boulé. But they take their place in the fraternity side by side with the well-educated, high-achieving first-generation college graduates, thus expanding the reach of those who get to "know the best of one another."

In addition to the tireless efforts of leaders, an organizational change in the Boulé helped increase the number of boulés and add new members to existing ones. The Grand Boulé again took up the matter of regions. The idea had caught on slowly, despite the fact that as early as January 1966 the executive committee had established a pilot regional meeting, with the full backing of the grand sire archon. As with most new ideas, there were those who saw merit in the proposal and those who opposed it. Though the issue was debated and discussed in meetings in 1968 and 1970, it was not until the meeting in San Francisco in 1972 that the Grand Boulé amended the constitution to include the regional concept. But in so doing, it pointedly insisted that "The Program of the Regional Convention shall be primarily social [and] would promote interest in activities of the Boulé as set forth in the preamble of the Constitution." The action recognized five regions of the fraternity: Northeast, Southeast, Central or Middle West, Western, and Pacific.

It did not take long for the regional system to take on a life of its own, and the regional meetings quickly became far more than "purely social." The regional structure mirrored that of the national organization, and the regions soon came to exercise considerable influence in Boulé affairs. Regional sire archons served on the Grand Executive Committee, where they represented the interests of their regions and kept the committee informed of activities and, when appropriate, problems in the regions.

As in most of its actions, it turned out that the regional system worked to the benefit of the entire Boulé. Meeting in odd years (since the Grand Boulé

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met in even years), the regional gatherings provided additional opportunities for archons and archousai to congregate and maintain the Boulé spirit among a larger group than the individual boulés. In time, the grand officers recognized the importance of having men who were knowledgeable about local areas during efforts to establish new boulés. Accordingly, the expanders, especially Franklin and McKinney, made full use of regional leaders in their efforts. The regional system has become part and parcel of the social and political structure of the Grand Boulé.

After Miami, the new leadership also worked to implement a social action program and to establish a foundation for the fraternity. Both ideas had been percolating within leadership circles since the 1964 meeting of the Grand Boulé in New York, but in its fashion, the Boulé had made haste slowly. During the 1970–1972 biennium, however, the executive committee imposed an annual tax of $25 on each archon to carry out a social action program. The announcement of the tax met with much initial grumbling and stiff opposition, largely because the members had had no opportunity to vote on the new tax, but at the meeting of the Grand Boulé in San Francisco in 1972, the delegates passed the social action tax by a wide majority and authorized the establishment of a social action committee. Further, it expected the executive committee to take appropriate action to get the initiative going during the next biennium.

The Grand Social Action Committee became one of the most active committees in the Boulé, and membership on the committee was coveted by archons. In addition to planning social action for the larger fraternity, it also encouraged and monitored the activities of the member boulés on that front. Though member boulés, at the discretion of member archons, varied broadly in what they did on social, civic, and political matters, the Grand Boulé's interest focused on three issues: youth development, which would encourage young people to look forward to successful careers; expanded participation in the local and national political process; and gathering, analyzing, and selectively disseminating reliable data on the conditions of black Americans. Given that these activities were all done in the name of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, the Boulé clearly was no longer a secret organization.

Two other thrusts—the establishment of the Boulé Foundation and the creation of a public policy committee under the leadership of Eddie William during his terms as grand sire archon–elect (1996–1998) and grand sire archon (1998–2000)—publicized the fraternity even more. The idea of establishing a foundation for the Grand Boulé had been around for decades, having first been officially proposed by Grand Sire Archon William C. McNeil in his

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1927 report.[68] Officially established in 1980, largely as a means of providing permanent funding for the social action programs, the Boulé Foundation became one of the most successful and influential programs in the history of the Boulé under the chairmanship of Harvey Russell and then Robert V. Franklin. Foundation leaders have succeeded in securing some support from corporations, but the bulk of the gifts that built the corpus of the foundation came from archons and archousai. Indeed, the archons' commitment to the Boulé Foundation and to maintaining its good work in perpetuity is manifested by the fact that the members voted to pay an annual sum directly to the foundation as a condition of membership in Sigma Pi Phi. Even more important, many archons make personal contributions, together bestowing millions of dollars on the foundation. The multimillion-dollar Boulé Foundation has an ongoing program of giving to worthy concerns, including a national scholarship program for outstanding youngsters.

The Grand Boulé that convened in Houston, Texas, in 1996 turned out to be one of the most momentous in Boulé history and marked the fraternity's full-throated public announcement of its militancy. At the meeting, Anthony Hall of Nu Boulé succeeded Hargrove Wooten, also of Nu, as grand sire archon. More important for the Boulé, the members voiced their overwhelming opposition to holding the next meeting of the Grand Boulé in San Diego, California, as scheduled.[69] The issue of whether to go to San Diego, in the face of California's anti–affirmative action position, had come up in the executive committee as early as November 1995, when the committee had voted to proceed with plans to meet in San Diego.[70] That decision notwithstanding, and with a clear understanding that the executive committee had the constitutional authority to set the date and place for Grand Boulés, the delegates in Houston voted to boycott any meetings in California.

That vote at the Grand Boulé presented Hall and the executive committee with a problem. On the one hand, the leadership understood the members' sentiments and had no desire to hold a meeting that individual members might boycott. On the other hand, the executive committee had already contracted with hotels and other San Diego businesses, as had Alpha Pi Boulé in that city. Further, there was the matter of not wanting to disappoint the archons and archousai of Alpha Pi, who had already invested time and money in preparing for the meeting.

Given the state of affairs, and perhaps anticipating that the executive committee would not ignore the sentiments of the delegates, Grand Grammateus Calvin O. Pressley requested bids from member boulés that would be willing

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to host the 1998 Grand Boulé on short notice. Four boulés—Alpha Beta of Richmond, Virginia; Alpha Omicron of Seattle, Washington; Beta Zeta of Westchester County, New York; and Delta Lambda in Nassau, Bahamas—expressed a willingness and a capacity to provide an appropriate venue for the meeting.

Given this backdrop, the Grand Executive Committee of Sigma Pi Phi fraternity convened in November 1996, with the location of the forty-fourth Grand Boulé in 1998 as the number-one item on the agenda. After an earnest and impassioned debate, the committee voted eleven to zero, with four abstentions, not to go to San Diego in 1998, and recessed for the night. The following morning, on a motion by past grand sire archon Hargrove Wooten, who had abstained on the initial vote, the executive committee revisited the matter so that "we could get a unanimous vote on the decision to change the site of the Grand Boulé" and "present a unified action." Upon reconsideration, the motion passed unanimously, marking a major manifestation of the Boulé's social and political action.[71]

Having made the costly decision not to meet in San Diego, the committee turned its attention to which bid it would accept. Many members of the committee thought that it was important that the Grand Boulé meet on the West Coast, because meetings there were rare and archons from that region had begun to complain. Indeed, since 1941, the Grand Boulé had met on the West Coast only four times—three times in Los Angeles (1941, 1962, and 1990) and once in San Francisco (1972). Partly for that reason, but perhaps more because of Alpha Omicron's attractive bid, the executive committee officially agreed to hold the Grand Boulé in Seattle, Washington, in 1998. The decision to boycott California because of its anti–affirmative action stance and meet in Washington instead turned out to be ironic: the December after the Grand Boulé convened in Seattle, voters in Washington passed a resolution much like the one that had passed in California four years earlier. Only one other state, Florida, has enacted such laws.

Nonetheless, the decision to stand on principle and boycott California was the correct one, and it was neither easy nor cheap. Besides its financial losses associated with the pullout from San Diego, the Grand Boulé had another problem. The Pacific region had scheduled its 1997 meeting in California as well, but if the Grand Boulé could not meet there, neither could the regional boulé. The Pacific region changed its venue too, and the Grand Boulé covered the more than $8,000 it cost to do so.

Thus, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Grand Boulé is in some

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ways a much different fraternity from the one that was founded in Philadelphia at the dawn of the twentieth century. It is still an organization that seeks men of distinction and, through wisdom, faith, and brotherhood, melds them into a sacred fraternity. It is still an organization that helps them to "know the best of one another," that seeks "by concerted action to bring about those things that seem best for all that cannot be accomplished by individual action." In addition, it is clearly a national fraternity that is very much involved in national and local affairs, not just through individual archons but also through its Boulé Foundation, the activities of its social action and public policy committees, and the initiatives of its member boulés. Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, the oldest of the Greek-letter organizations among African Americans, remains first among them.

## Notes

1. For a fine review of these developments, especially among African Americans, see John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans,* 7th ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

2. Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877–1901* (New York: Collier Books, 1962).

3. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903).

4. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899).

5. Ibid.

6. Quoted in William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers since the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 54.

7. Quoted in Charles H. Wesley, *History of Sigma Pi Phi: First of the Negro American Greek-Letter Fraternities*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1954; 1969), 28. In addition to Wesley's *History,* see Hobart Sidney Jarrett, *The History of Sigma Pi Phi: First of the African-American Greek-Letter Fraternities (Founded May 15, 1904),* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Quantum Leap Publishers, 1995).

8. Preamble, first printed constitution, Sigma Pi Phi fraternity, 1908, Sigma Pi Phi Papers, Aurellia and John Hope Franklin Library, Fisk University, Nashville, TN. Hereafter, referred to as Boulé Papers.

9. In the beginning, Sigma Pi Phi intended to have an undergraduate group, called Thetes, and actually inducted three such members. All three died at a young age, however, and the fraternity dropped that category of membership and thereafter inducted

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only college graduates. It is instructive to note that the absence of college members also relieved the organizers of Sigma Pi Phi of having to deal with college administrators and campus politics. See Robert L. Gill, *The Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and the Men Who Made Its History: A Concise History* (Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, 1963), 1–5, for a brief example of administrative involvement in the establishment of that fraternity.

10. Wesley, *History,* 25.

11. See ibid., 38–40 for a fine but brief discussion of the tradition of the boulé in ancient Greece.

12. The term *archousa* (plural, *archousai*) became part of the lexicon of Sigma Pi Phi in 1925 at the Grand Boulé in Minneapolis–St. Paul, at the suggestion of Omicron Boulé of the Twin Cities.

13. Wesley, *History,* 55.

14. Several noted men of medicine, science, and letters were charter members of Beta Boulé. See ibid., 45–49. See also David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois, Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Henry Hunt, 1993), 315–17, for a brief discussion of Bentley. In 2002, the Grand Boulé change the term from *subordinate boulé* to *member boulé.*

15. Grand Sire Archon Henry M. Minton, Grand Sire Archon's Address, Grand Boulé, Baltimore, MD, 1909, Box 4, Boulé Papers.

16. Grand Grammateus's Report, Grand Boulé, Philadelphia, 1919, ibid.

17. Grand Grammateus's Report, Grand Boulé, Chicago, IL, 1911; Minutes of the Grand Boulé, ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. See also Wesley, *History,* 233, for a discussion of the admission issue.

20. Admission irregularities also caused major grumbling at the Grand Boulé in Washington, D.C., in 1913. Minutes, 4th Grand Boulé, Washington, 1913, Box 4, Boulé Papers.

21. Quote from *Boulé Journal* (March 1912). McCard's exceptionally long tenure can be explained in part by the fact that he served during World War I, when the Grand Boulé did not meet and thus could not elect officers.

22. Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, *2001 Membership Directory,* 265–66. Subsequent references to the establishment of member boulés are not cited but can be checked through this same source.

23. Minutes, 5th Grand Boulé, Nashville, TN, 1915, Boulé Papers.

24. Ibid.

25. Report of the Grand Grammateus to the 6th Grand Boulé, Philadelphia, PA, 1919, ibid.

26. Report of the Grand Sire Archon to the 6th Grand Boulé, ibid.

27. Minutes, 6th Grand Boulé, Philadelphia, 1919, p. 10, ibid. Although the minutes are silent on Turner's reasons for declining to serve, it might be that the Philadelphia Grand Boulé in 1919 was the first one that Turner or any other member of Iota

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(established in 1917) had attended, and he felt ill prepared for the number-one office. Wesley, *History,* is silent on the matter. It should be pointed out that Percy Julian was elected grand sire archon–elect in 1972, to serve as grand sire archon in 1974–1976, but declined because of ill health. Julian died in April 1975.

28. Wesley, *History,* 233.

29. Ibid., 262–63; Minutes, 17th Grand Boulé, Los Angeles, CA, 1941, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1941).

30. *Boulé Journal* (Spring 1923).

31. See Wesley, *History.* It is apparent that Bell lacked the fraternal spirit of Alexander L. Turner, who drew the lot in 1919 but declined to serve because of lack of experience; see note 27. Further, although both Gore and Stafford were charter members of Alpha Zeta, which was established in 1951, both had been archons in other boulés.

32. *Boulé Journal* (Spring 1929).

33. Minutes, 11th Grand Boulé, Columbus, OH, 1929, Boulé Papers.

34. For a good, but old, firsthand account of the Sweet incident and the NAACP's involvement, see Walter White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1948), 71–79. White, who was assistant secretary to James Weldon Johnson, was also an archon. The Sweets eventually prevailed in court, setting an important legal precedent about the rights of African Americans to protect their homes and thus hurrying the demise of legal housing discrimination.

35. See William H. Harris, *Keeping the Faith: A. Philip Randolph, Milton P. Webster and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, 1925–37* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), for a discussion of the long and deep involvement of Vann and the *Pittsburgh Courier* with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.

36. See the voluminous correspondence between Grand Grammateus A. A. Wesley and the parties to the dispute, including the leaders of local boulés, especially Zeta Boulé, in Correspondence File, Boulé Papers.

37. Minutes, 11th Grand Boulé, Columbus, OH, 1929, Boulé Papers. See also David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919–1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 212–14.

38. Editorial, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1929).

39. Quoted in Andrew Buni, *Robert L. Vann of the* Pittsburgh Courier: *Politics and Black Journalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), 170. Despite his anger, Vann remained a devoted member of the Boulé until his death in 1940 and even served as grand grapter in 1933–1934. Huey Long, governor of Louisiana (1928–1932) and U.S. senator (1930–1935), was a colorful and controversial figure whose long political career was ended in 1935 by an assassin's bullet.

40. Minutes, 11th Grand Boulé, Columbus, OH, 1929, Boulé Papers.

41. Wesley, *History,* 196–99; Grand Grammateus Allen A. Wesley to Sire Archons, July 9, 1924, Boulé Papers.

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42. Minutes, 15th Grand Boulé, Atlanta, GA, 1937, Boulé Papers.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Correspondence Files, Boulé Papers.

46. *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1946). See also Wesley, *History,* 286–88, 323. Following Scott's speech, the Boulé adopted a resolution appointing a Committee on National Policy and Action to plan the social action proposed by the grand sire archon.

47. Archon Charles Wesley, the grand historian, claims that members of the Boulé ostracized DuBois after the 1948 speech. Quote from Charles H. Wesley, "W. E. B. DuBois, the Talented Tenth and Sigma Pi Phi," *Boulé Journal* (Winter 1973). See Wesley, *History,* 323, for a brief discussion of the committee's action in 1950.

48. Quoted in ibid. DuBois does not specifically mention Sigma Pi Phi, but the reference is clear. Wesley writes in part: "response of blacks [to DuBois's indictment] was slow and uneven. DuBois said that he had 'belonged to a Negro graduate fraternity 45 years and helped in its organization . . . an organization of a large number of Negroes who were business and professional leaders, but that had only offered him sympathy and none had offered aid.' In his 'New York Chapter he was bitterly criticized.'" Lewis, *DuBois, 1919–1963,* 546–53, provides a fuller and more sympathetic review of the issue.

49. *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1958): 1–9.

50. Minutes, 24th Grand Boulé, Hampton, VA, 1958, Boulé Papers. See also correspondence, ibid., and *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1958).

51. Percy L. Julian, "Faultless Prophets," *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1964): 9.

52. Ibid.

53. It should be pointed out that the ostracism of DuBois was far from permanent. By the time of the Diamond Jubilee in 1979, the *Boulé Journal* prominently featured DuBois's entire speech in a commemorative edition in a section titled "Great Speeches of Yesteryear." Julian's speech is not among them.

54. Minutes, 28th Grand Boulé, Nashville, TN, 1966, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1966).

55. Memorandum, Grand Grammateus George Redd to Executive Committee, April 21, 1968, Boulé Papers.

56. *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1968).

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1970): 53.

60. Minutes, 29th Grand Boulé, Philadelphia, PA, 1968, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1968): 37.

61. George N. Redd to Percy L. Julian, and return, Boulé Papers.

62. Minutes, 30th Grand Boulé, Miami, FL, 1970, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1970).

63. Ibid.

64. *Boulé Journal* (Spring 1980): 29–30, carries the happy story of the chartering

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of Beta Theta Boulé. See also *New York Times,* April 26 and 27, 1980; *Jet Magazine,* May 8, 1980, 15–16; and note 22 above. This was the third time the Grand Boulé had withdrawn and reassigned the designation of a member boulé. In 1948, it withdrew the charters of Mu Boulé, Wichita, Kansas (1921), and Nu Boulé, Denver, Colorado (1921), and reassigned them to Mu Boulé, northern New Jersey (1949), and Nu Boulé, Houston, Texas (1950), respectively.

65. See note 22 above.

66. *Final Report of the Member Survey Study for the Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity Five-Year Strategic Plan* (Collier and Associates, August 1999). It is likely that the percentage with PhD degrees includes EdD and other doctorates associated with education, since those degrees are not enumerated in the document.

67. Raymond Pace Alexander, "Black Excellence in the Era of Revolution," Memorial Service Address to the Grand Boulé, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1970): 9.

68. Grand Sire Archon's Report, 10th Grand Boulé, Detroit, MI, 1927, p. 4, Boulé Papers.

69. Minutes, Grand Boulé, Houston, TX, 1996, *Boulé Journal* (Fall 1996).

70. Executive Committee Minutes, November 4, 1995, Grand Boulé Headquarters.

71. Ibid., November 5, 1996.

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# 5

# Education, Racial Uplift, and the Rise of the Greek-Letter Tradition

## The African American Quest for Status in the Early Twentieth Century

*Michael H. Washington and Cheryl L. Nuñez*

Among the sayings of our race,
Suggestive and surprising,
That fill a most exalted place,
Is, "*Tell them we are rising.*"[1]

—Rev. George C. Rowe, "We Are Rising"

## Unreconciled Strivings

In 1903, on the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, a black-sponsored Greek-letter organization came briefly into being, with the purpose of strengthening the African American voice at the university and in the city. Alpha Kappa Nu is the first recorded collegiate black Greek-letter organization (BGLO) in the history of the United States. Very little is known about this early club, and there is no record of its having survived. Similarly, two years later, a second black Greek-letter fraternity, Gamma Phi, was founded on the campus of Wilberforce University in Ohio. Although it continued for nearly three decades, during which time it spawned four chapters, it appears that neither the alpha chapter nor its offshoots have survived.[2]

These first attempts to establish BGLOs hardly seem noteworthy, but despite their failure to take hold, they represent an auspicious beginning—the germination of a new idea. It is not that the idea of a college fraternity was unprecedented, for it had been part of the liberal arts tradition since the founding of Phi Beta Kappa more than two centuries earlier at the College of Will-



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iam and Mary.[3] Certainly, on campuses like the one at Bloomington, white students participated in Greek-letter fraternities. Nor was the secret fraternal ideal unfamiliar to blacks, for in the Masons, the Elks, and numerous other benevolent, mutual aid, and social organizations, they had a long-established tradition of self-help and solidarity. It was, however, the first time that blacks would establish such an organization on a college campus.

At a time when few students of any race advanced to the postsecondary level, blacks in northern institutions of higher education belonged to an elite class, far removed from the masses of ordinary African Americans four decades after emancipation. In the age of Jim Crow, most whites lumped all blacks together under the assumption of "Negro inferiority." Though the color line in the South took a different turn, racial proscriptions in the North, where blacks were far less numerous, were equally severe. At the turn of the twentieth century, even for rising black intellectuals in the North, there was no sanctuary from the indignities of white supremacy.

In the face of these conditions, it is highly likely that the black students at Indiana University were seeking a vehicle for self-help and racial solidarity through which they could experience the full breadth of the liberal arts tradition, despite the restraints of the color line. But, in their choice of the secret and exclusive Greek model, they also reflected the tendency of the black elite to define self-help largely in assimilative terms and to seek status through the adoption and adaptation of white upper-class institutions and values. Irrespective of their motives, it appears that their small numbers hastened the demise of the organization. Although little is known about their brief experiment, it has been established that there were insufficient registrants to ensure its continuation, and Alpha Kappa Nu faded into obscurity soon after it began.[4]

The black Greek-letter tradition offers a glimpse of the contradictions inherent in the black struggle for status in America, of the "double-consciousness" that W. E. B. DuBois so brilliantly enunciated in the *Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, around the time of Alpha Kappa Nu's inception. He observed:

> The Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused con-

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> tempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[5]

As the self-appointed leaders of the black masses, the black intellectual elite followed a prescription for racial uplift, exemplified by the National Federation of Colored Women's Club motto "Lifting as We Climb."[6] Measuring their climb by the yardstick of white values, they strove to acquire education, culture, and refinement and then to fortify the masses through training and example. But at the turn of the twentieth century, their ascent into the "kingdom of culture" only led them to new heights of exclusion.[7] While their rejection by whites spurred race-conscious responses, their unrequited quest for status in the white world led them to distance themselves from the masses of their own race. Greek-letter organizations were creations of this "double-consciousness," reflecting impulses toward both black communal values and the trappings of white American elitism. They are rooted in the history of the black journey toward recognition and respect through the portal of higher education.

If at first four million African Americans thought emancipation would bring them the status they desired, they were soon proved wrong. The promise of radical Reconstruction, which made them citizens, enfranchised black males, and established common schools throughout the South, was quickly withdrawn when the Compromise of 1877 restored white rule. Chattel slavery was replaced by peonage, crop lien, and convict lease systems. The schools that had been established for the ex-slaves were neglected as the Freedmen's Bureau withdrew and turned them over to the states. Black southerners, who, for a while, formed majorities in some state legislatures and sent twenty-two representatives to Congress, saw suffrage repealed throughout the South by state-sanctioned poll taxes, white primaries, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses, and by 1910, they were once again disfranchised.[8]

This counterrevolution was reinforced by paramilitary organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Knights of the White Camellia, and the Red Shirts, as well as by violent mobs that used intimidation and murder to curtail black rights and preserve white rule. Their reign of terror—of night riding, assassinations, lynchings, and riots—extended into the North and continued well into the next century. In a series of cases decided between 1873 and 1883, effectively nullifying the Reconstruction Amendments and Civil Rights Acts, the highest court of the land joined in the conspiracy to re-enslave and disfran-

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chise blacks.[9] With its infamous 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* sanctioning the doctrine of "separate but equal," it reified the assumption of black inferiority that would be inscribed in the law for nearly sixty years.

In the face of these betrayals, a spirit of black nationalism was reignited. If political equality with whites was not possible, self-determination and self-sufficiency seemed to offer the only practical vehicles for status—if not within the white world, then alongside it. In search of economic opportunity and an escape from white violence, a handful of blacks migrated to Africa; others went west in the "Exoduster" movement led by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton; and many headed North. This widespread dislocation resulted in the formation of a number of all-black towns, including some in Kansas, Oklahoma, and Florida, many of which eventually failed for the same reasons that called them into being—the economic and political vulnerability of the settlers. Locked out of the growing industries of the North and the South and overwhelmingly tied to land they did not own, in 1900, nine-tenths of all African Americans remained in the South, trapped at the bottom of the class structure, disfranchised, poor, and largely illiterate.[10]

Alongside the black masses rose a black professional class, which earned its livelihood by catering to the needs of segregated black communities. Educated and economically self-sufficient business owners, physicians, lawyers, clergymen, undertakers, journalists, and teachers were the leaders in their Jim Crow communities. Many were mulattoes, who traced their antebellum roots to free blacks and privileged house slaves in the South and took pride in the education, wealth, and light complexions they had inherited from their white relations. This black "upper class," having become assimilated to white culture through education and, in some cases, relatively close contact with whites, sought status by distancing themselves socially from the uncultured masses of African Americans. Nevertheless, they felt duty-bound to uplift the lower sort, perhaps in fear of being pulled down themselves.[11]

Extolling the virtues of thrift, industry, and morality, they built institutions for self-help: banks, labor unions, and businesses; churches, schools, and a number of secret benevolent, fraternal, and social organizations. Noting the popularity of the latter, Leon Litwak explains, "the rituals, titles, and uniforms that characterized the fraternal orders gave members a welcome respite from their daily routines and made them feel like somebody in a society that insisted they were nobody." The leaders of the elite, the "representative men" and women, established hosts of conventions, conferences, and associations to forge action plans for racial defense and advancement. The Afro-American League

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and its successor, the Afro-American Council; the American Negro Academy; the National Association of Colored Women; the National Business League; Booker T. Washington's annual farmers' conferences; and DuBois's annual Conference on Negro Problems were just a few such efforts. As they weighed strategies to counter the effects of white supremacy, they also considered solutions to the "Negro problem." Their remedy to both was education.[12]

By education, they had in mind the preparation of the masses for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, led by a vanguard of black intellectuals like themselves whom DuBois dubbed "the talented tenth." The majority of uneducated blacks just out of slavery viewed the acquisition of education as a practical necessity as well as a social advantage. Education meant independence from white dominance and control. The ability to read and write their names, to understand labor contracts, to calculate their compensation, and to read the Bible would make them self-sufficient, and self-sufficiency would give them status within their communities.[13]

During slavery, even without the guidance of an intellectual elite, countless blacks had defied the strict and sometimes deadly proscriptions against literacy to secretly teach themselves and others to read. It was their organic leaders, just one foot out of slavery, who had led the movement to adopt universal public education for the first time in the South. As southern legislatures withdrew support for black education, African Americans endured "double taxation," making private contributions on top of their taxes to support their public schools. At the same time, they continued to maintain their own private and denominational schools for elementary instruction and to pay tuition at private black postsecondary institutions.[14]

The burden of providing for their own schooling reflects the hostility of the planter-dominated South, intent on preserving an uneducated and docile labor force, to black educational development. With the exception of some brief experiments during Reconstruction, southern public schools enforced strict racial segregation, and despite the *Plessy v. Ferguson* mandate of "separate but equal," the black schools were far from equal to those for whites. Faced with the burdensome expense of maintaining a dual school system, school boards routinely diverted expenditures from black schools to white ones, spending "at least twice as much" on the latter.[15] As a result, black schoolchildren were left with inferior facilities and equipment, higher student-teacher ratios, and teachers who were poorly prepared and underpaid. In addition, the black common schools often maintained shorter school terms to accommodate the children's employment in the fields.[16] As a result, though they ben-

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efited from a traditional liberal arts curriculum similar to that taught in the white schools, most black common school students fell far behind their white counterparts at the same grade level.[17] Finally, as a consequence of chronic underfunding, the schools for blacks could not keep pace with the enormous demand, and between 1880 and 1900, "the proportion attending public schools fell."[18] Sadly, at the turn of the twentieth century, despite their insatiable thirst for education, nearly two-thirds of elementary-age black children did not go to school at all, in part because there were not enough black teachers to teach them.[19]

## BLACK HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

The burden of supplying teachers and other leaders to serve the needs of segregated black communities fell to the system of southern black colleges and normal schools. These institutions became the sites of harsh ideological, political, and economic turf battles by black leaders, southern whites, and northern philanthropists for more than a century. Their antagonism turned on the question of black equality. If blacks were to be full and equal citizens, they would require a literate culture, the capacity for economic self-sufficiency, and the moral discipline for democratic citizenship. If they were to remain citizens in name only, economically and politically dependent on whites and bound to the soil with no hope of rising, they would require acculturation of a different sort. Recognizing the strategic necessity of producing a black leadership capable of guiding the masses in the proper direction, each side fought to control the content and purpose of black education.

Virtually the entire system of black higher education sprang up after the Civil War. Although five such institutions were in operation between 1837 and 1866, there is no evidence that they awarded baccalaureate degrees before the war's end. The real flowering of higher educational opportunities for blacks came at the close of the war through the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau, with support from the northern missionary societies. After the discontinuation of the bureau in 1872, the missionary philanthropists assumed responsibility for some and founded other "leading" black colleges in the South. The American Missionary Association ran Fisk University, Straight University (now Dillard), Talladega College, and Tougaloo College. The Methodist Episcopal Church established Bennett College, Clark University, Claflin College, Meharry Medical College, Morgan College, Philander Smith College, Rust College, and Wiley College. The American Baptist Home Mission Society controlled Benedict

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College, Morehouse, Shaw University, Spelman Seminary, and Virginia Union University. The Presbyterian Board of Missions for Freedmen operated Biddle University (now Johnson C. Smith), Knoxville College, and Stillman Seminary. Independent boards of northern missionaries operated Atlanta, Howard, and Leland Universities.[20]

Black religious denominations administered schools as well. The African Methodist Episcopal Church institutions included Allen University, Morris Brown College, and Wilberforce College. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church controlled Livingstone College. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church controlled Lane, Paine, Texas, and Miles Memorial. State conventions of black Baptists operated Arkansas Baptist College, Selma University, and Virginia College and Seminary. The black denominations accounted for less than 15 percent of black college student enrollments. The vast majority of black college students in the South were enrolled in the white missionary institutions.[21]

Professional schools existed at some of these institutions. Biddle, Howard, Gammon, Straight, Wilberforce, Lincoln University, and Virginia Union offered schools of theology. Only two, Shaw and Howard, had law schools, and there were medical schools at Meharry, Leonard, Howard, Knoxville College, and New Orleans. Of the private missionary and religious colleges for blacks, two were in the North: Lincoln in Pennsylvania, and Wilberforce in Ohio. One was located in the West, in Missouri, the rest were located in the southern or border states.[22]

The private black colleges reflected the egalitarian vision of their missionary founders. The white philanthropists shared with black religious educators a belief in the essential humanity of black people and in education as their path to full inclusion in the American polity.[23] Toward this end, the northern-trained missionaries modeled the institutions for blacks after the educational institutions they themselves had attended and, as Mary Frances Berry and John Blasingame note, "tried to make black colleges the counterparts in every detail to the most elite New England colleges."[24] The curricula in their schools reflected a strong emphasis on the classical liberal arts. The first-year collegiate course included Latin, Greek, and mathematics; sophomores studied Greek, Latin, French, mathematics, and natural science; juniors were taught these plus German, natural philosophy, history, English, and astronomy. In addition, seniors studied mental, moral, and political sciences. Although they offered a smattering of industrial courses—mainly agriculture, building trades, and domestic science—these often served as student work programs for those work-

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ing their way through school and were never the focus of the curriculum. Indeed, in 1896, when Henry L. Morehouse coined the phrase "talented tenth" to describe the "few gifted souls" who would be "trained to analyze and to generalize," he was asserting the basic philosophy of the classical program of black education, endorsed by the missionary philanthropists and later expanded on by DuBois.[25] Despite their egalitarian zeal, however, the white missionary institutions employed few black faculty or administrators, belying a paternalism that evoked resentment from black students.[26]

Far less numerous than the private black institutions were the federal land grant colleges, established as a result of the Morrill Acts. The first Morrill Act was passed in 1862 to provide funds for the maintenance of an agricultural and mechanical college in each state, but only four black institutions benefited from these proceeds. The second Morrill Act in 1890 increased the benefits to states with racially dual educational systems, with the mandate that the funds be distributed equitably to black schools. Thus, even before the *Plessy* decision, the federal government gave official sanction to the concept of "separate but equal." Within a few years after the passage of the second act, land grant institutions for blacks had been set up in seventeen southern states.[27] The states not only misappropriated the funds designated for the black institutions but also overlooked the black schools entirely in the disbursement of federal research funds, such as those allocated by the Hatch-George Act and McIntyre-Stennis Forestry Research Law.[28] So disproportionate was the funding that in 1900, appropriations to white land grant colleges eclipsed those to the blacks by a ratio of approximately 26:1.[29] Predictably, the states took advantage of their financial authority to restrict the curricula of the black land grants, ensuring that they were appropriately geared toward industrial education; hence, none of them offered curricula at the college level until 1916, and what they did offer was substandard in comparison to the curricula of the private black institutions. According to historian James Anderson, the black federal land grant and state schools were "colleges or normal schools in name only."[30]

## INDUSTRIAL EDUCATION AND THE "GOSPEL OF WORK"

As the primary vehicle for the education and assimilation of the former slaves, the training of teachers had been the impetus for the development of advanced educational opportunities for blacks. It was largely this function that "commercial-minded" white southerners and northern industrial philanthro-

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pists, taking advantage of the continued shortage of black teachers, sought to control.[31] In 1900, the majority of black teachers were trained in small, private secondary and normal schools and colleges.[32] Whereas black educators looked to the classical liberal arts curriculum to provide training for political and economic advancement, these whites advocated a curriculum of industrial education to keep blacks in their place—attached to the soil. Indeed, the movement for industrial education was an insidious scheme to eliminate *education* for blacks altogether and to replace it with a program of character development and manual labor training to mold them ideologically and practically for subservient roles in the southern economy. Black teachers were viewed as the perfect missionaries who, once indoctrinated, could inculcate the ideology of black subordination and the habits of labor in the masses of public school students. By replacing the academic curricula of the private secondary and normal schools and colleges, where the majority of black teachers were trained, with the industrial version, the movement for industrial education sought to subvert black education from "top to bottom."[33]

The idea behind the industrial education movement had been born in 1868, with the founding of Hampton Institute by Samuel Chapman Armstrong. Modeled on a manual labor training school in Hawaii, it was organized as a normal school, offering a "rudimentary" education, with the principal stress on manual labor. The Hampton model was replicated in 1881 at the Tuskegee Institute, under the direction of Booker T. Washington. With strong financial support from industrialists, Tuskegee grew in numbers and influence, and Washington became the movement's most persuasive apologist. His 1895 speech at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition reassured white southerners—and outraged many blacks—that the Hampton-Tuskegee idea advocated black accommodation to white supremacy. Urging blacks to establish an economic base in lieu of agitating for social and political rights, he publicly denied the usefulness of classical liberal arts education, saying:

> Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labour and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life; shall prosper in proportion as we learn to draw the line between the superficial and the substantial, the ornamental gewgaws of life and the writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.[34]

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His widely publicized speech would provoke heated debate among black leaders for decades. Among Washington's most vocal critics were Monroe Trotter and W. E. B. DuBois, who organized the Niagara Movement in 1905, giving rise to the interracial National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, which agitated for what Washington denounced—political, social, and economic equality for blacks and higher education for teachers and leaders to guide them.[35]

With Washington as its most visible propagandist, the movement gained momentum in 1898 with the first meeting of the Conference for Education in the South at Capon Springs, West Virginia, where a coalition of "northern businessmen-philanthropists" and southern whites met to consolidate their influence over the private black institutions. When the black missionary and denominational schools resisted their hegemony, they targeted with greater success the relatively smaller, more vulnerable, private black secondary and normal schools. In the face of opposition from southern white planters, who rightly feared that any education—academic or industrial—would make blacks less tractable as common laborers, and from white missionary educators and black leaders, who saw through the scheme to downgrade their curricula, industrial philanthropy exerted less of an influence on black higher education in the South than it had hoped for.[36]

Just decades after emancipation, the institutions founded for the education of blacks were fulfilling their missions and developing a well-trained leadership infrastructure among the ex-slaves and their children. In his 1900 study *The College-Bred Negro,* DuBois found that through 1899, black colleges had graduated 1,941 students, or 83 percent of all black college graduates in the country.[37] Viewing the same study, historian Henry Bullock noted that of the 1,883 graduates of thirty black colleges in the South, 37.2 percent were serving as teachers in southern schools. He also found that

> approximately one tenth, or 11.3 percent, were serving as clergy men, 4.0 percent as physicians, and 3.3 percent as lawyers. The others were employed as civil service workers, merchants, and store clerks. Only 1.4 percent were engaged in farming. . . . Approximately one fourth had assumed some kind of responsible role of leadership on a voluntary as well as employment basis. Most of these were guiding religious societies, investing in Negro business enterprises, and contributing to newspapers or helping edit them. Many, spreading their leadership more thinly, had begun to work with charitable, agricultural, or health organizations.[38]

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The success of the schools is further signified by the changing complexion of the college and university faculty. As has been noted, the missionary institutions employed hardly any blacks prior to 1900, but as a consequence of the instruction provided in these institutions, the number of black teachers in the private colleges and secondary schools of the South would increase, eventually replacing the white missionaries and shifting greater control of the institutions to blacks themselves.[39]

Despite this positive record, the black institutions were saddled with insurmountable obstacles. Chief among them was the inadequate preparation of the students they served. Due to the deficiencies of the common schools and the dearth of public high schools for blacks, many students were ill prepared for education on the collegiate level. Hence, in 1900, while most white college students received precollegiate training in high schools, "about nine-tenths of all students in the Negro institutions were precollegiates," enrolled in elementary and secondary classes.[40] Despite their best efforts to replicate the New England experience, and although most carried the designation of "college" or "university," DuBois found that with few exceptions, the admissions standards of the black colleges placed them at least two years behind their northern white peers, and some were "little above an ordinary New England High School."[41] Underfunded, with inadequate library and research facilities, and forced to serve students at every level of preparation, only a handful of the black institutions of higher learning could be properly characterized as colleges in the traditional sense.[42]

For the black students fortunate enough to obtain baccalaureate degrees, opportunities for graduate and professional advancement were limited. There were a few professional schools for blacks, but they did not confer the same benefits as their white counterparts. "Recognized graduate study" in Negro colleges did not begin until 1921 at Howard University.[43] Prevented from seeking advanced training at white institutions in the South, the black teachers in the state schools and the black religious institutions lacked the qualifications of their white peers. To make matters worse, with the exception of the normal schools, black institutions were excluded from accreditation and the curricular standardization and status it brought.[44] In the face of these obstacles, the meagerly endowed private schools, like the underfunded state schools, could produce only a fraction of the graduates necessary to serve the segregated black communities.[45] Although they were able to resist the pressures of industrial education and maintain a liberal arts orientation, this did not place them on a par with most northern white universities during the late nineteenth century.

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Stamped inferior by law and custom, they were, at best, second-rate imitations of the colleges in the North that they sought to emulate.[46]

## CLIMBING THE IVORY TOWER: THE QUEST FOR ADMISSION TO NORTHERN WHITE SCHOOLS

For blacks at the turn of the twentieth century, higher education was a prerequisite to entrance into professional occupations and hence an important determinant of class status.[47] It was a mark of achievement to earn a degree from one of the "better" black colleges, but for many status-seeking blacks, one or more degrees from a white institution in the North—with the advantages of superior educational offerings, opportunities for graduate advancement, and contact with the elite of the elite—was a symbol of upper-crust status.[48]

The black elites sought to distance themselves from the masses of their people by identifying with upper-class whites in whatever manner they could. On this point, E. Franklin Frazier notes:

> A large section of the old middle class sought compensations in their white heritage. They were not merely proud of their white complexion, but they boasted of their kinship with the aristocratic whites of the South. In fact, in some cases their white ancestors had helped them to secure an education or had provided for them economically. They also sought compensations in the standards of puritanical family and sex mores, which set them apart from the black masses. But the chief compensation for their inferior status in American society was found in education. While their racial heritage and conventional standards of morality only gave them a privileged position in the Negro community, education gave them access to a world of ideas that provided an intellectual escape from their physical and social segregation in American life. Therefore, they placed an exaggerated importance upon academic degrees, especially if they were secured from white colleges in the North. If one secured the degree of doctor of philosophy in a northern university, he was regarded as a sort of genius. Consequently, for the relatively small group of educated Negroes, education was an indication of their "superior culture" and a mark of "refinement."[49]

Until the turn of the century, northern white colleges had produced just one-sixth of all black college graduates, and few institutions could claim more than a handful of the total number. Topping the list for the number of black

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graduates was Oberlin in Ohio, which accounted for approximately one-third. In 1826, Amherst College (Massachusetts) and Bowdoin College (Maine) had been the first to graduate black students—Edward Jones and John Brown Russworm, respectively.[50] DuBois asserted that blacks were welcome in most of the northern and western colleges, though he acknowledged that there were many women's colleges and "two of the larger colleges" where they were "strongly advised not to apply." But the record suggests that although they were not explicitly excluded from white institutions, and in some cases were fairly treated as individuals or in small groups, blacks were welcomed only as exceptions, not as the rule. From 1820 to 1898, Rutgers, New York University, and Northwestern graduated only one black student each. Between 1885 and 1898, the University of Kansas graduated sixteen, an average of just over one per year.[51] In all the colleges in the state of Indiana, between 1861 and 1900, black students were graduated at a rate of only one every three years.[52] Perhaps the attitude of many colleges toward black students is reflected in the response of Princeton University's president to DuBois's survey for *The College-Bred Negro:*

> The question of the admission of Negro students to Princeton University has never assumed the aspect of a practical problem with us. We have never had any colored students here, though there is nothing in the University statutes to prevent their admission. It is possible, however, in view of our proximity to the South and the large number of southern students here, that Negro students would find Princeton less comfortable than some other institutions.[53]

For a long time, Oberlin was exceptional in its attitude toward black students. Founded in the early 1830s, it had implemented a policy of integration at the insistence of a group of seminarian abolitionists from Cincinnati. From that time until the end of the nineteenth century, 5 to 8 percent of the student body was black.[54] Given its history of racial tolerance and reputation as a hotbed of radical abolitionism, the school drew blacks from throughout the South, many of them the mulatto sons and daughters of wealthy white planters. It is descriptive of the hardening color line in the North that when alumna Mary Church Terrell sent her daughters to Oberlin in the latter part of the century, it had adopted a policy of racial segregation in the dormitories.[55]

Terrell, who held two degrees from Oberlin, belonged to Washington, D.C.'s elite black society. She was a teacher and principal, a member of the Washington, D.C., Board of Education, the cofounder and president of the National

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Association of Colored Women, and the first woman president of the Bethel Literary and Historical Association. The daughter of one of the country's first black millionaires, she was married to Robert Terrell, a Harvard graduate who would later become a municipal judge.[56] In comparison with the black masses, northern-trained black intellectuals like the Terrells enjoyed economic security and occupational mobility, but only within the narrow confines of the black community. Though their training qualified many of them for the highest academic appointments in their white northern and European alma maters, sadly, those doors were still closed to African Americans.[57] Despite holding credentials from Fisk, Harvard, and the University of Berlin, when DuBois went to the University of Pennsylvania to conduct his seminal study of the Philadelphia Negro, he was denied a position on the faculty and, instead, was given the title of "assistant instructor."[58] Naturally, many black scholars and intellectuals sought positions in the "better" black colleges—Howard, Fisk, Atlanta, Morehouse, and Spelman—but when none were available, they found an outlet for their talent in black secondary education.

The elite M Street School, later known as Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, in Washington, D.C., was a notable beneficiary of this overflow of talent. The school was elite precisely because of the high caliber of its black teachers and administrators. Mary Jane Patterson, whose graduation from Oberlin College in 1862 made her the first African American female college graduate in the United States, was principal of the school from 1870 to 1871 and from 1873 to 1874. Richard Greener, the first black graduate of Harvard to receive an AB degree, served as principal from 1871 to 1872. He would later be appointed professor of metaphysics at the University of South Carolina, serve as dean of Howard University's School of Law, and hold the post of U.S. consul to Bombay and Vladivostok.[59] Francis L. Cardozo was principal from 1884 to 1896. He had studied at the University of Glasgow and the London School of Theology. When he had been secretary of state and state treasurer of South Carolina during Reconstruction, even his enemies had acknowledged that he was the best-educated man in the state. With a degree from Oberlin, Anna Julia Cooper was principal from 1902 to 1906.[60] Carter G. Woodson, who earned degrees from Harvard and the University of Chicago, and Angelina Weld Grimké were among its many prominent teachers.[61]

Many of the school's students would become equally prominent. During the height of its prestige from 1900 to the 1950s, it sent a large number of students to Oberlin and Ivy League and Seven Sisters colleges, including Amherst, Dartmouth, Harvard, Radcliffe, Wellesley, Williams, Vassar, and Yale.

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William Henry Hastie and Charles Hamilton Houston went on to Amherst; and Judge Robert Terrell and Roscoe Conkling Bruce were destined for Harvard. In this manner, the racial exclusion of the black elite had an unintended benefit, as it reproduced itself in successive generations of black leaders who would pound at the doors of white privilege and opportunity.[62]

Provoked, no doubt, by the countless examples of black achievement, the white popular imagination held tight to its derogatory assumptions about blacks. It was spurred by the racist polemics of academic and literary figures such as Thomas Dixon Jr., whose popular novels *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman* would help influence the early-twentieth-century revival of the Ku Klux Klan. Black intellectuals found weapons against this racist hegemony in the study of black culture and history. The Bethel Literary and Historical Association in Washington, D.C., Crummell's and DuBois's American Negro Academy, and, later, Woodson's Association for the Study of Negro Life and History were examples of their attempts to "raise consciousness of their common bonds with their race" and to use education to answer the charge of Negro inferiority with "facts, facts, facts."[63]

When white cultural hegemony failed to contain black ambitions, white anxieties found an escape valve in the practice of racial violence. Lynching and mob violence, against individuals as well as entire communities of blacks, were extreme acts of coercion to preserve white supremacy. Between 1882 and 1901, documents show that 1,914 blacks were lynched, and between 1882 and 1903, forty such victims were black women. The first two years of the twentieth century alone saw 214 lynchings. According to Herbert Shapiro, "after 1900, lynchings continued as weekly phenomena, and mob assaults, comparable to European pogroms, against black communities became commonplace occurrences in both the North and the South," in part because the growing congestion of urban life "made for a tendency for confrontations to be particularly explosive." The last decade of the nineteenth century had witnessed a shocking riot in Wilmington, North Carolina, reportedly by a mob of a thousand who had "terrorized" the black community and, by one report, killed as many as twenty-five, precipitating black migration to the North.[64]

But if blacks thought that they could find an escape from racial brutality in the North, the dawn of the new century proved them wrong. In New York City in 1900, the killing of a policeman by an African American touched off another rash of mob violence against the black community. Within the decade, horrendous white riots would occur in Atlanta, Georgia, and Springfield, Illinois. In both the North and the South, these attacks had the tacit

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approval, in some cases, or the full participation, in others, of the forces of law and order.[65] Even when an incident was precipitated by the action of just one individual, as in the case of the New York riot, whites felt justified to take their wrath out on an entire black community. Whatever pretext was given for the outrage, the pattern of violence suggests that the real provocation was collective white resistance to the exercise of black rights.[66]

At the dawn of the twentieth century, it was clear that racism, which had once been ascribed to the southern mentality, was a unifying national ideal. It was, as DuBois recognized, not confined to south of the Mason-Dixon line but was reflected in "the color line" that extended even beyond the United States to its growing empire abroad. As an expression of their solidarity with the liberation struggle of black and brown Cubans, African Americans eagerly fought in the Spanish-American War. In the thrall of double-consciousness, some even believed that U.S. hegemony would bring uplift to those "members of the 'weaker races'" abroad, while others expressed faith that by proving their fitness as soldiers, they could prove their fitness as citizens. Many others, however, recognized the inherent contradictions not only of fighting a war for a country in which their own rights were not secure but also of extending the proscriptions of Jim Crow to other peoples of color. Indeed, at home, black soldiers found that military sacrifice did not shield them from the indignities of racial insults and discrimination. For example, when violence erupted in Brownsville, Texas, in 1906 and two whites were killed, three entire companies of the First Battalion of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment were held responsible and dishonorably discharged, to the outrage of many African Americans. Even West Point graduate Charles Young, the first African American to hold the rank of colonel, would learn that military service (he had led troops in the Philippines) was no guarantee of fair treatment and equal status with whites when he was forced to retire against his will.[67]

No matter how well educated, cultured, or patriotic they were, elite blacks like Charles Young walked a fine line between assimilation and protest. The institutions they built to socialize blacks to white norms and values were simultaneously vehicles of protest against white supremacy, both literally, in the sense of newspapers and protest organizations, and figuratively, in the case of schools, churches, and other self-help organizations that produced daily challenges to the myth of Negro inferiority. They evinced the same contradictions in relation to white institutions, where they battled the color line yet emphasized class distinctions. They preached racial unity but practiced exclusivity. Relative to the black masses, they seemed "as separate as the fingers of a hand."

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In the safety of black enclaves like Washington, D.C., where Howard University served as an intellectual Mecca and African Americans constituted more than a third of the population, the black elite had numerous inducements to practice class-consciousness. But in communities where they were more or less invisible and their survival depended on unified effort, opportunities to practice exclusivity were self-limiting.[68]

Far from the security of a substantial black community, black students on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University were pioneers in a hostile land. The community had a history of pro-slavery leanings and of ostracizing its few black residents. The university had enrolled its first black student, a local resident, in 1882. In 1891, Marcellus Neal became its first black graduate, followed by Preston Emanuel, who entered in 1892 and obtained a master's degree. A member of the football and baseball teams, Emanuel faced discrimination while traveling with his team and remained, for many years, "the last Black student to play football for Indiana." In the racially charged atmosphere of the first decades of the twentieth century, conditions for the handful of black students on the campus seemed scarcely better. According to William Crump:

> Their presence was almost completely ignored by white students. To make matters worse, one black might be on campus for weeks without seeing another. Under these circumstances, assimilation into the life of the school was impossible. The administration maintained an attitude of indifference as blacks were slowly matriculated and swiftly forgotten. They were denied use of entertainment and recreational facilities, and only in field and track were they permitted to display their athletic prowess. Participation in contact sports was emphatically denied them.[69]

As they had in 1903, in 1911, students would once again seek to remedy their isolation by establishing a Greek-letter society. They named the organization Kappa Alpha Nu and later Kappa Alpha Psi, possibly in honor of its short-lived predecessor Alpha Kappa Nu. Most of the founding members knew little about college Greek-letter societies except for what they had observed while working as waiters at white fraternities. Because they had to work their way through college, these students denounced the emphasis on wealth and privilege that was characteristic of certain other fraternities. Two of them had been approached to join a fraternity at Howard but had declined because they disagreed with the attitudes and actions of the members. Hence, the founders

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agreed that their organization would emphasize "high Christian ideals" and achievement. Among its chief objectives were to bring some "improvement to campus life" and to recruit other blacks to the university.[70]

The fraternity at Howard was Alpha Phi Alpha, whose parent chapter was on the predominantly white campus of Cornell University. Though separated from the Indiana campus by hundreds of miles, the effort at Cornell had been born of the same spirit. The students there had struggled for several months to determine whether their "social study club" should take the form of a Greek-letter organization.[71] Believing that it should reflect the tradition of a literary club and serve the cultural and social needs of the black community, C. C. Poindexter, the first president of Alpha Phi Alpha, was opposed to the idea of its becoming an elite secret society. According to Charles Wesley, Poindexter did not believe that black students were at a level of social and cultural development to justify distancing themselves from one another on the already isolated white campus. In addressing this concern, the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha experienced the contradictions of "double-consciousness" that plagued other elite blacks in their quest for status at the turn of the century. They struggled with the question of whether the organization should address the academic and social needs of the black students, as well as the issues of "segregation, discrimination, prejudice, mistreatment, and the advancement of themselves and their people," or become a Greek-letter fraternity. On October 27, 1906, the answer came when George B. Kelley, one of the founders (known as the Seven Jewels), moved to retain the name Alpha Phi Alpha for what would become the first continuing BGLO in the United States.[72]

Given the climate of the times, it is understandable why the black college fraternity would be conceived on a predominantly white campus and then be planted on the campus of an elite black institution. In deciding where its Beta chapter should be located, the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha naturally turned to Howard University, a bastion of black education in Washington, D.C, where a larger community of black intellectuals could expand its possibilities as an elite yet race-conscious tradition of black collegiate life.

## Allure of the Greek Fraternal Ideal

### COLLEGE LIFE AND THE ROLE OF FRATERNITIES

The Greek-letter fraternity system experienced considerable growth during the first half of the nineteenth century, largely in response to the religious

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fervor, patriarchal control, and strict discipline of American colleges. According to one historian, "the fraternities offered an escape from the monotony, dreariness, and unpleasantness of the collegiate regimen which began with prayers before dawn and ended with prayers after dark; escape from the long winters and ingrown college world, from the dormitory with its lack of privacy." In this pious environment, the fraternities offered a diversion from mundane concerns, with their emphasis on "good friendship, good looks, good clothes, good family, and good income." They were virtual "schools of success," which, by assuming increased responsibility for their members' housing, catering, manners, and participation in athletic competitions and other campus activities, were "institutionalizing new prestige values, the attributes of a successful man of the world, *this* world," and "redefining success in secular terms."[73]

As the century progressed, adherence to the German model of education moved colleges further in the direction of secularism, toward an emphasis on intellectual discovery as the basis of national "unity, pride, and *kultur*."[74] The first American university planned entirely on that model was Johns Hopkins, incorporated in 1867, where a focus on faculty professionalism and research, the differentiation of undergraduate and graduate study, and the use of electives enhanced the relevance of the curriculum to an increasingly specialized, industrialized society.[75] No longer merely a training ground for aristocracy, education was increasingly linked to the political and economic needs of the state.[76]

As the emphasis on specialization during the latter part of the nineteenth century shifted the focus away from athletics, clubs, and other extracurricular diversions, fraternities increasingly filled the void. Left to provide for their own lodging and recreational needs in increasingly cold and impersonal institutions, students turned to the fraternities for a sense of identity and belonging.[77] Eventually, college presidents came to appreciate the role of Greek-letter organizations as complements to the curriculum in the development of the "whole" student, and in 1909 they joined with fraternity representatives in the founding of the National Interfraternity Conference.[78] Perhaps they recognized that the fraternity system was not subversive after all; just as the colleges and universities were sorting students to fit the economic and political order, the fraternities, through their secret and exclusive rituals, were grooming a select few for privileged status in society.

According to Charles Wesley, after 1900, the Greek-letter fraternity system grew at an unprecedented rate. "In 1883, there were twenty-six college fraternities with 66,345 members. This number had increased to thirty-two college

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fraternities with 1,068 chapters in 1910, and in 1912 there were forty college fraternities with 256,087 members. By 1922 the increase had pushed the number to sixty-six college fraternities with 2,000 active chapters and an enrollment of over 500,000 members."[79] As centerpieces of American college and university life, which mirrored the racial and class hierarchies of the larger society, it is no surprise that the fraternities did not welcome the handful of black students attending northern institutions at the turn of the twentieth century.[80] In light of the dearth of black students on northern campuses, the fraternities, like the institutions that housed them, had little need for explicit policies of exclusion; nevertheless, a survey administered in the mid-1920s by the National Interfraternity Conference found that of fifty fraternities, more than half had membership restrictions that excluded blacks.[81]

In other aspects of campus life, black students were tolerated on northern campuses to varying degrees. As a student at Harvard in the 1880s, DuBois had joined some clubs, but the Glee Club rejected him because Harvard "could not afford to have a Negro on its Glee Club traveling about the country."[82] Blacks on the whole were relegated to the margins of white college life. Recalling the virtual dynasty of wealthy New Englanders who dominated campus life, DuBois noted, "the class marshal on commencement day was always a Saltonstall, a Cabot, a Lowell, or from some such New England family. The crew and most of the heads of other athletic teams were selected from similarly limited social groups. The class poet, class orator, and other commencement officials invariably were selected because of family and not for merit."[83] When his peers conspired to challenge this tradition by naming an unquestionably deserving black man as class orator, it generated a national firestorm of controversy.[84]

In that New England bastion of privilege, the curriculum, too, reflected white upper-class interests. As a "defender of wealth and capital," Harvard had by that time, in DuBois's estimation, turned away from the legacy of "Sumner and Philips" and "was willing finally to replace an Eliot with a manufacturer and a nervous war-monger."[85] As evidence of the university's "reactionary" leanings, he recalled, "the trusts and monopolies were viewed frankly as dangerous enemies of democracies, but at the same time as inevitable methods of industry. . . . Strikes like that of the anarchists in Chicago and the railway strikes of 1886, the terrible Homestead strike of 1892 and Coxey's Army of 1894, were pictured as ignorant latent lawlessness, lurching against conditions largely inevitable. Karl Marx was mentioned only to point out how thoroughly his theses had been disproven."[86]

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On the subject of European politics, DuBois would later note the tendency of the faculty to portray "the little old woman at Windsor" as "a magnificent symbol of Empire" and the Berlin Conference of 1885 as "an act of civilization against the slave trade and liquor."[87] Though at the time he did not fully realize the racist implications of these assumptions, he recognized that the interests of black people and the curricular focus of the university were entirely different matters. When DuBois received a grade of E on his master's thesis for errors in grammar and style, he conceded, "I knew the Negro problem and this was more important to me than literary form."[88]

Excluded from the inner sanctum of Harvard life, DuBois sought comfort behind the curtain of segregation, where he was "encased in a completely colored world, self-sufficient and provincial, and ignoring just as far as possible the white world which conditioned it." He wrote, "my friends and companions were drawn mainly from the colored students of Harvard and neighboring institutions, and the colored folk of Boston and surrounding towns."[89] Despite Harvard's history of racial tolerance, for DuBois, as for many of his black peers, racial exclusion both on and off campus was a salient feature of the college experience, helping to foster a heightened racial consciousness that superseded geography and school affiliation. As he would recount, "thus the group of professional men, students, white-collar workers, and upper servants, whose common bond was color of skin in themselves or in their fathers, together with a common history and current experience of discrimination, formed a unit that, like many tens of thousands of like units across the nation, had or were getting to have a common culture pattern which made them an interlocking mass, so that increasingly a colored person in Boston was more neighbor to a colored person in Chicago than to a white person across the street."[90] Paradoxically, this racial unity was circumscribed by a strict class-consciousness, so that the segregated world of black elites like DuBois was, in many ways, but a mirror image of the white world from which they were excluded.

Decades later, between 1915 and 1919, even the gregarious and multitalented Paul Robeson, who distinguished himself in the classroom, varsity debating team, glee club, honor societies, and football, basketball, baseball, and track teams, would experience the indignities of racial isolation. Robeson, who was senior class valedictorian and inducted into Rutgers' prestigious Cap and Skull Honor Society as "one of the four men who best represented the ideals of Rutgers," was nevertheless ostracized from social functions that implied a measure of social intimacy with whites and from extracurricular activities that thrust him into the hostile white community beyond the campus.

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Opposing football teams refused to play against the man the papers called "the big darky," onlookers in the stands hurled racial epithets at him, and even his own teammates subjected him to brutal mistreatment. For support, he turned to a clique of other black collegians from the surrounding area. In spite of his immersion in campus life, he recognized the unyielding reality of the color line, noting later, "'there was a clear line beyond which one did not pass'; college life was 'on the surface marvelous, but it was a thing apart.'"[91]

Racial isolation and alienation would characterize the experiences of other black firsts on white college campuses well into the twentieth century. As one of only three black students at Brown University from 1924 to 1928, J. Saunders Redding would lament the unbearable toll racial seclusion took on his peers and himself. Taking pains to avoid being seen together on campus for fear of being considered clannish, inhibited in their mannerisms around whites, he and a network of blacks from colleges all over New England sought release in one another's company away from campus, engaging in episodes of bacchanalian revelry. Under the weight of this alienation, five of his peers, including two women, would commit suicide over a period of six years.[92]

Reflecting on his own experience many years later as one of two blacks to integrate Kenyon College, historian Allen Ballard observed a pattern of alienation among black students in white institutions. He noted in *The Education of Black Folk* that although they were "duly elected to a variety of campus posts, from athletic captaincies to presidencies of various student bodies and membership in diverse honorary organizations," black students were rejected by the fraternities, around which the social life of the campus revolved. Tokenized and marginalized, blacks at Kenyon sought to prove by their manners, speech, and carriage that "Jefferson's views on the Black mentality were incorrect."[93] The pressure took a "cumulative toll, both psychically and academically," and only three of his eight classmates, with support from the local black community, made it to graduation.[94] This phenomenon, he noted, was common in small white institutions, as opposed to the large colleges, where "relatively numerous Blacks students and Black fraternal and sororal organizations, provided the social and psychological supports necessary to cope with hostile and indifferent institutions."[95]

The insularity that black students experienced on white campuses was an inducement to develop their own organizations for social intimacy and mutual support. Despite Cornell's reputation for liberality in its admissions policy, in the early twentieth century, its campus was by no means free of racial discrimination. According to Cornell historian Morris Bishop, in 1900, a south-

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ern student withdrew in protest of the two blacks in his class, and in 1911, white female undergraduates objected to the occupancy of two black women in their dormitory.[96] One of the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha, George B. Kelley, would later recount a general atmosphere of exclusion: "The Negro at Cornell, the same as at any other large university, was set aside and we couldn't do some of the things that the others were doing."[97]

In the social hierarchy of the Ithaca campus, the white fraternities stood at the pinnacle, their "splendid fraternity houses, imitating the homes of the arrogant newly rich. The Chi Psi's occupied the Fiske-McGraw mansion, one of the most opulent homes in central New York. No more pretentious fraternity lodges were ever to arise at Cornell, or in fact anywhere."[98] Indeed, the sumptuous fraternity houses were a source of consternation to Cornell president Schurman, who considered them antithetical to the "democratic spirit" for which the university was known.[99] About the turn of the century, the Cornell fraternities began excluding Jewish pledges, spurring the establishment of the university's first Jewish fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau, in 1907.[100] Not surprisingly, they also prohibited membership by blacks.[101] The black students who would establish Alpha Phi Alpha, some of whom had worked at the white fraternity houses, hoped to organize "in a way that they could give mutual aid educationally, in their work, and by advice."[102] Clearly attracted to the Greek allure, they determined to have a fraternity of their own.[103]

Had it not been for the elite status that white college fraternities enjoyed, the Alpha Phi Alpha founders might have chosen a different organizational structure and purpose, for a number of alternatives had already been established within the black intellectual community. It is clear that they considered at least one, initially forming a social study or literary club.[104] According to Dorothy Porter, the Negro literary societies appeared in the first third of the nineteenth century for the purpose of moral and intellectual improvement. Known also as debating and reading-room societies, they sought to stimulate reading and to disseminate "useful knowledge" by providing "libraries and reading rooms." They also helped to support the aspirations of burgeoning black scholars by providing them with audiences as "critics and channels of publication" and to train future "orators and leaders by means of debates." The literary societies flourished in New York, Cincinnati, Poughkeepsie, Boston, New Bedford, Providence, Baltimore, Detroit, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. Some were coeducational, and many were led entirely by women. Modeled after white organizations such as the Junto Club, founded in Philadelphia in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, the black literary societies were formed in response

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to blacks' exclusion not only from the white organizations but also from formal educational opportunities in general. Combining an interest in culture with concerns for black liberation, many shared their members with the antislavery societies. In advocating for racial reform, they revealed the "internalized racism" inherent in what Kevin Gaines calls "racial uplift ideology," for their insistence on black moral and intellectual improvement reflected the paternalistic values of the dominant culture, as well as their own low opinions of the black majority.[105]

The idea of the literary society reached its apex when the Reverend Alexander Crummell formed the prestigious American Negro Academy in 1897, for the purpose of applying "scholarly methods to the task of elevating the Negro people."[106] Its distinguished membership included sociologist W. E. B. DuBois, historian John Cromwell, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, theologian Francis Grimké, bibliophile Arthur Schomburg, and director of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, Carter G. Woodson. Of its purpose, DuBois wrote, "the Negro Academy ought to sound a note of warning that would echo in every black cabin in the land: *unless we conquer our present vices they will conquer us;* we are diseased, we are developing criminal tendencies, and an alarmingly large percentage of our men and women are sexually impure. . . . The Academy should seek to gather about it the talented, unselfish men, the pure and noble-minded women, to fight an army of devils that disgraces our manhood and our womanhood."[107] Anna Julia Cooper, herself a scholar of top rank, was excluded from membership in the academy and would criticize the absence of "noble-minded women" from the all-male organization.[108] By rooting the discourse of liberation in the language and values of the dominant culture, the black intellectual elites of the academy perpetuated, paradoxically, the racist and sexist assumptions that undermined black progress.

By the time participants in the Niagara Movement first met at Niagara Falls in 1905—the same year Henry Callis went off to Cornell—conditions for black Americans had worsened. The black intellectuals who launched the Niagara Movement did so as a protest, drafting a platform for "aggressive action" and demanding "freedom of speech and criticism, male suffrage, the abolition of all distinctions based on race, the recognition of the basic principles of human fellowship, and respect for the working person."[109] The movement, which would be absorbed into the biracial NAACP within four years, was an inspiration to Callis and offered him and his peers another positive example of race-conscious organizing.

Strategies for uplift of the race took many turns. As black elites stressed

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the necessity of political activism in that regard, many also continued to emphasize social distinctions among blacks themselves, perhaps in an attempt to counter popular assumptions of fixed biological inferiority by offering themselves, "an aristocracy of talent," as exceptions.[110] When six black doctors in Philadelphia founded Sigma Pi Phi in 1904, they had no "social action agenda."[111] Rather, because they were unwelcome in elite white organizations, they organized for purely social reasons, to "bring together a selected group of men with a minimum degree of superior education and culture."[112] "The first elite national black men's club," known as the Boulé, was open only to male college graduates who had distinguished themselves by superior professional or intellectual achievement.[113] Though himself a member of the prestigious group, which also included Carter G. Woodson and Rhodes scholar Alain Locke, DuBois would come to criticize the organization for its lack of social consciousness.[114] With its Greek nomenclature, secret activities, and emphasis on strictly social activities, the Boulé exemplified yet another organizational option for race-conscious intellectuals like Henry Callis and his peers at Cornell to pursue.[115]

It is clear that of all the options that lay before them, none could match the appeal of the collegiate Greek-letter fraternity, which was, after all, the paragon of status within the white campus culture. Adapting its white structure to a black purpose offered the Alpha Phi Alpha founders a legitimate vehicle by which to nurture their social needs, help compensate for their total exclusion from the white fraternities, and give them status among other black collegians. At the beginning, they debated whether a purely social organization, especially an exclusive one, was too narrow a mechanism for self-help. As time went on and the period known as the Reform Era unfolded, Alpha Phi Alpha would expand its emphasis from the social life of the Ivy League campus to a broader program of civic involvement. As other black fraternal and sororal organizations came into existence, community service as a mechanism for racial uplift would become a hallmark of many of their activities.

## THE PARADOX OF PROGRESSIVISM

At the dawn of the twentieth century, blacks honored Abraham Lincoln's birthday with a song written especially for the occasion by James Weldon and J. Rosamond Johnson. What would become the national anthem for black Americans was rich with remembrance and hope, exhorting, "Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us / Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us / Facing the rising sun of our new day begun, / Let

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us march on till victory is won."[116] The new century began, as new centuries do, with a glimmer of optimism. President Theodore Roosevelt seemed disposed to court black voters when he issued a historic invitation to Booker T. Washington to dine with him at the White House. What many blacks viewed as a hopeful sign, white southerners saw as the ultimate betrayal. When Roosevelt appointed William Crum to the collectorship of the port of Charleston, stating that he "would not close the door of hope to any American citizen," his words were reassuring to blacks but "deadly miasma" to white southerners.[117] When a black Mississippi postmistress was forced by hostile whites to resign in 1901, Roosevelt refused to accept her resignation and closed the post office for months rather than replace her. Blacks began referring to Roosevelt as "our President—the first since Lincoln set us free."[118]

Black cultural achievement early in the century, the fruit of the long black quest for educational development, offered seemingly irrefutable proof that the biological determinists were wrong. In 1900, the illiteracy rate of blacks fell below 50 percent for the first time.[119] As black elementary and secondary school attendance increased, so did the numbers of blacks entering colleges in both the North and the South. Higher educational opportunities for blacks expanded with the founding of nine black colleges,[120] including the first such institution in Florida, founded in 1904 by Mary McLeod Bethune.[121] Churches were expanding their community outreach through social reform efforts that linked the "Social Gospel" to the needs of the black community.[122] Contributing to an impressive corpus of "race literature" were such acclaimed black intellectuals as Charles Chesnutt, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Frances Watkins Harper, Booker T. Washington, Anna Julia Cooper, and W. E. B. DuBois. In 1907, Harvard PhD Alain Locke became the first black Rhodes scholar.[123] Scott Joplin's ragtime music was the rage, and W. C. Handy would soon be dubbed "Father of the Blues."[124] Painter Henry Ossawa Tanner was earning acclaim in Paris and around the world, while Meta Warrick Fuller was earning a reputation as a sculptor of note.[125] Black boxer Joe Gans held the lightweight boxing title between 1901 and1903, and Jack Johnson was the heavyweight boxing champion from 1910 to 1915.[126] In 1904, Milwaukeean George Poage became the first black to compete in and win a medal in the Olympic games in St. Louis.[127] By 1900, five black professional baseball teams, which would later constitute part of the popular Negro Leagues, were entertaining enthusiastic black fans.[128] In 1909, adventurer Matthew Henson became the first person to reach the North Pole, and Elijah McCoy would add the graphite lubricator to the long list of his notable inventions.[129]

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The signs of an expanding black middle class were also evident in the proliferation of black newspapers and economic institutions. The black press was an important vehicle of self-help and self-sufficiency. In 1900, African Americans supported 3 black daily and 150 weekly newspapers,[130] and over the next few years, they launched others: the *Chicago Defender, Boston Guardian, New York Amsterdam News, St. Louis Argus,* Cincinnati's *Union,* and the NAACP's *Crisis.*[131] As whites became less willing to insure them, blacks looked after their own financial security by establishing mutual aid and insurance companies, such as the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, the Atlanta Life Insurance Company, and the Standard Life Insurance Company, also of Atlanta.[132] According to John Hope Franklin and Alfred Moss Jr., "by 1914 approximately 55 Black banks had been organized."[133] These included the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank in Richmond, Virginia, which was the first bank in America owned and operated by a woman, Maggie Lena Walker.[134] In business, Madame C. J. Walker launched a thriving industry with the manufacture of black hair and skin-care preparations. Booker T. Washington organized the National Business League in 1900 and counted 320 local branches by 1907.[135]

When black people emerged from the gloomy post-Reconstruction years, which Rayford Logan dubbed "the nadir,"[136] they were cautiously optimistic as they entered the period historians have labeled the Progressive Era, because it promised progress through reforms. Henry Arthur Callis, who lived through those trying times, described them as "a low, rugged plateau."[137] In 1900, DuBois polled blacks about their hope for the future of the race. With understandable ambivalence, one respondent replied, "I am hopeful, but I fear."[138]

There were good reasons to fear in the era of Jim Crow. Before 1900, Jim Crow laws in the South had generally applied only to trains, but in the first decade of new century, they would be extended to streetcars, steamboats, and waiting rooms.[139] The movement to disfranchise blacks was gaining momentum, such that between 1899 and 1910, North Carolina, Alabama, Virginia, Georgia, and Oklahoma joined other southern states in enacting constitutional disfranchisement.[140]

Jim Crow not only sanctioned the separation of the races but also reinforced it with the warrant of racial science. "Between 1890 and 1930, over one-hundred social intelligence studies of Blacks, Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, and Europeans . . . formed a mass of 'scientific' evidence on racial differences . . . on one factor alone the investigators were united: the racial inferiority of poor white, Southern European, and 'non-white' nationalities and races, i.e. the working class."[141] Early-twentieth-century advocates of eugenics, the science

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of selective human breeding, pressed for legislation to restrict immigration and to sterilize those who carried "genetic" infirmities. According to George Fredrickson, "In the context of Progressivism and imperialism, an ideal approximating a benevolent internal colonialism came to dominate national thinking about the race question. This was a point of view permitting liberals and moderates to manifest some concern about Southern blacks, but it also sanctioned their acquiescence in the basic Southern policies of segregation and disfranchisement."[142]

In 1900, more than 100 African Americans were lynched.[143] According to Logan, between 1901 and 1910, a total of 846 lynchings occurred, and approximately 90 percent of the victims were black.[144] Ida B. Wells-Barnett, who painstakingly documented this phenomenon, courageously called for federal protection against lynching. She noted, "time was when lynching appeared to be sectional, but now it is national—a blight upon our nation, mocking our laws and disgracing our Christianity."[145]

This violence was precipitated by the rapid urbanization of the nation. Shapiro states, "as the cities grew, disparate ethnic, racial, and class groupings struggled to define their place in the urban context. The city did not dissolve existing tensions but rather provided a critically important arena within which the tensions of American society would manifest themselves."[146] During the first decade of the century, a major riot in New York City, followed by other large urban conflagrations throughout the nation, proved that physical violence against black citizens could occur with the tacit, if not explicit, support of local and federal authorities.[147] Even as local politicians attempted to reform city government, they left the issue of racial violence unchecked.

Indeed, the regular practice and constant threat of extralegal racial violence functioned as a useful tool of state repression, buttressing the legal edifice of Jim Crow. The administrations of all three Progressive presidents had shown total disregard for the interests of black citizens. Roosevelt disappointed black observers when he capitulated to southern white pressures and "discharged three companies of black soldiers after the Brownsville incident in 1906, and Taft tolerated restrictions on black voters in the South and encouraged the development of a 'lily-white' Republican party, removing black people from federal jobs in the region."[148] But no Progressive administration was more openly racist than that of Woodrow Wilson. As Franklin and Moss note, many African Americans had believed his campaign promise to practice "absolute fair dealing . . . in advancing the interest of their race."[149] Yet, during his first administration, Wilson gave official sanction to segregation by ordering "seg-

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regated toilets, lunchroom facilities, and working areas" in a number of federal departments, including the Treasury Department and the Post Office, as well as by implementing a racist federal appointment policy.[150] His racial stance was reflected in Congress as well. "During the first Wilson administration nearly two dozen anti-Negro measures were introduced in the House and Senate . . . from Jim Crow transportation regulations and armed forces enlistment to prohibition of miscegenation, civil service segregation, and repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment."[151] When Progressive politicians envisioned progress, they relegated blacks to the back of the line.

African Americans were not the only group that was marginalized during this period. With the growth of industrialism, capitalists such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, Morgan, and Gold, who controlled the oil, steel, coal, railroad, and banking industries, sought to consolidate their enormous wealth and eliminate wasteful competition by creating monopolies. In 1904, 40 percent of U.S. manufacturing was controlled by 318 of these powerful trusts, worth more than $7 billion. Driven by greed, the captains of industry sought to exploit the American working class, including white native and immigrant workers and farmers, women, and children. Excluded from this labor pool, blacks were to serve as a reserve workforce to help keep wages low and guarantee against labor unrest and costly work stoppages.[152]

Consumers too were victims of capitalist abuse. A lack of quality and safety standards in food, health care, and drugs left them vulnerable to deception, exploitation, and injury. Pressure from social reformers and muckraking journalists induced Progressive politicians, seeking to restore balance to the social and economic order, to implement a host of concessionary reforms, including the Clayton Anti-Trust Act, Federal Reserve Act, Food and Drug Act, Federal Trade Commission Act, Keating-Owen Act (restricting child labor), and Federal Farm Loan Act.[153]

On its face, Progressivism promised a kinder, gentler democracy, but as Gilbert Gonzalez notes, one of its primary targets was to quell the class struggle.[154] In order to bring the rival classes into harmony, the reformers emphasized a vision of democracy that depended on the balance of its constituent parts. Influenced by the notion of an organic society, advanced by sociologists Edward A. Ross and Charles Horton Cooley, they promoted limited reforms as a hegemonic restraint against group antagonisms.[155] Noting the tendency of reformers to effect superficial rather than radical change, Howard Zinn asserts, "much of this intense activity for Progressive reform was intended to head off socialism."[156]

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## THE REFORM ERA, WOMEN, AND BLACK COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Since the reform period of the early nineteenth century, women had assumed the principal burden of social reform. During the Progressive Era, middle-class white women were better educated, yet they were still denied suffrage and remained largely relegated to the domestic sphere. They found both an escape from the home and a perfect environment in which to apply their reformist energies in the teeming misery of the urban slums.[157] There, influenced by theories of social Darwinism, they set to work to reform the moral and social welfare of the less fortunate. Temperance was among their principal causes. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, under the leadership of Frances Willard, boasted branches in every state and a membership exceeding 200,000.[158] They built kindergartens and health care programs and worked to secure child labor laws. Some, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, advocated for women's economic equality.[159] As one precondition for that economic equality, they argued for women's right to birth control. And, believing that the path to these reforms lay in their enfranchisement, they lobbied for women's suffrage. The problem with many of these early-twentieth-century white women reformers was that as they pressed for inclusion in the existing power structure, they often accommodated its racist and sexist norms. A notable example was the refusal of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) to press for universal suffrage, which would have extended the vote to black women too. Reminiscent of her nineteenth-century counterparts who refused to endorse the Fifteenth Amendment, Carrie Chapman Catt, leader of the NAWSA, revealed a narrow self-interest when she insisted, "we stand for the removal of the sex restriction, nothing more, nothing less."[160] Similarly, the birth control movement had both sexist and racist implications. Even as its leader, Margaret Sanger, advocated greater freedom for white women, the strong influence of eugenics led her to advocate birth control methods for women of the lower classes as a safeguard against the proliferation of masses of defective offspring.[161] Rather than mount a unified challenge to the forces of patriarchy, the federations of white women's clubs, including the national YWCA, capitulated to one of its greatest weapons in their own enforcement of racial segregation.[162]

As the number of white college-educated women increased, college campuses became sites of reform activity. In 1908, suffrage groups from the campuses of Bryn Mawr, Barnard, Radcliffe, Smith, and the Universities of Wisconsin, Chicago, and California gathered to form the National College Woman's Equal Suffrage League. In 1911, students and faculty members at

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Mount Holyoke organized a chapter of the Equal Suffrage League and, a year later, participated in a Boston suffrage parade. Wellesley professor Vida Scudder, who claimed membership in the Socialist Party, joined faculty colleagues in protesting a Rockefeller gift to the university and, in 1912, in supporting striking women in the nearby town of Lawrence.[163] It was clear that on the nation's college campuses a new generation of white women was being groomed to lead in the quest for social reform.

In contrast to the white women's reform movement, from which they were excluded, black women reformers were uniquely sensitive to both the "woman question and a race problem."[164] Consequently, they distinguished themselves from their white counterparts by their campaigns against lynching and Jim Crow, as well as by efforts that recognized black women's special vulnerability to sexual assault. Anna Julia Cooper reflected their awareness of the inextricable relationship between black women's liberation and racial uplift as a whole, noting, "only the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter . . . then and there the whole Negro race enters with me.'"[165] This commitment to the race led black women to endorse more universal reforms, such as those involving education and health care. They supported black hospitals and preventive health programs to combat tuberculosis, venereal disease, infant mortality, and malnutrition. They established schools from kindergartens to postsecondary institutions.[166] Through organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs and the Phillis Wheatley Club, as well as through local colored YWCA branches, they supported orphanages, homes for the aged, food and clothing drives, and programs to address housing shortages.[167]

Unfortunately, despite the "special angle of vision" that allowed elite black women reformers to see the crucial nexus of race and gender,[168] they shared with their white counterparts a tendency toward class myopia. They couched their charity in paternalistic language that reflected their elitist identity and reinforced both patriarchal norms and prevailing assumptions of black inferiority. Mary Church Terrell, president of the National Association of Colored Women, exemplified this limitation when she said:

> It is unfortunate, but it is true, that the dominant race in this country insists upon gauging the Negro's worth by his most illiterate and vicious representatives rather than by the more intelligent and worthy classes. Colored women of education and culture know that they cannot escape altogether the consequences of the acts of their most depraved sisters. They see that even if they were wicked enough to turn a deaf ear to the call of

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> duty, both policy and self-preservation demand that they go down among the lowly, the illiterate and even the vicious, to whom they are bound by the ties of race and sex, and put forth every possible effort to reclaim them. By coming into close touch with the masses of our women it is possible to correct many of the evils which militate so seriously against us and inaugurate the reforms, without which, as a race, we cannot hope to succeed.[169]

Restricting their leadership to the educated black elite, the most influential networks of black women's clubs emerged in major urban centers such as Philadelphia, Washington, New York, Boston, Chicago, and New Orleans. Naturally, they also took root on the various black college campuses, including Fisk University, where students were instrumental in the development of the Nashville Urban League's Bethlehem House Settlement.[170] These college organizations were, by their very nature, exclusive, and they often imposed membership restrictions. According to Margaret Murray (Mrs. Booker T.) Washington, the organizer of the Tuskegee Women's Club, that organization was open only to "those connected with the faculty as teachers and those who were indirectly connected, that is, the wives of the gentlemen teachers."[171] Also exclusive was Atlanta University's Neighborhood Union, under the leadership of Lugenia Hope Burns, wife of university president John Hope. Like the Tuskegee ideologues, educators at the black liberal arts institutions placed responsibility for the social and moral conditioning of the race on their female students. As an educator and founder of the Woman's League, Rosa Bowser asserted, "Not only must these upright Negro women take their role as counselors and teachers, but it is highly essential that they be WITH the element to be uplifted, yet, certainly NOT OF it . . . there is no way to reach such people other than by going among them."[172] Notwithstanding the exceptional black women who distinguished themselves in individual pursuits in business, medicine, and law, black women as a group had far fewer routes by which to improve their social status than were available to their black male and white female counterparts. Ironically, the Progressive period, which in many ways proscribed the lives of black women, also provided an impetus for and, with its emphasis on social reform, gave legitimacy to black women's activism as reform workers. Like white college reform organizations, black collegiate women's clubs created one of the few acceptable vehicles for their leadership, and hence status, within the traditional sphere of social welfare advocacy.

In some ways, the black faculty and students on the black campuses were themselves subject to the paternalism with which they viewed the black work-

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ing class. Virtually all the presidents and administrators and most of the faculty of the black colleges in the early decades of the twentieth century were white. According to Raymond Wolters, they continued to emphasize moral uplift, piety, discipline, and regimentation on the black campuses long after those values had been abandoned by the "leading white colleges" for more secular concerns. Many black students suspected that this focus was "prompted by a racist belief that Negroes were particularly sensuous beings who could not discipline themselves and were not prepared to exercise free will."[173] In this stultifying atmosphere, gender expectations were bound to be conservative. Howard University, with its "suffocating restrictions imposed on the women," provides an excellent example. Howard professor Kelly Miller, who would become a founding member of the NAACP, paradoxically opposed women's suffrage, on the principle that "such status was not contemplated as a normal social relation."[174] Perhaps it was a concern for "normal social relations" that motivated Howard's board of directors to vote that any female teacher who "thereafter married while teaching at the university would be considered as having resigned her position."[175]

Though surrounded by others of their race, the nine Howard women who initiated Alpha Kappa Alpha must have experienced feelings of alienation in response to this atmosphere of institutional patriarchy and white paternalism. Just as the founders of the black fraternities at Cornell and Indiana were moved by hostile conditions to create their own vehicles for self-help and status, these women, caught in the double bind of race and gender, must have felt a heightened desire for group unity and social status. Following the example of Alpha Phi Alpha, which had established a chapter on the campus the year before, they organized the nation's first black sorority in 1908.[176]

Though similar to their fraternal predecessor in its Greek trappings, the founders of Alpha Kappa Alpha would, from the start, place a greater emphasis on community service as preparation for their lives as professional women. According to Jacqueline Moore:

> As the sons took their cues from their fathers, so the daughters of the black elite emulated their mothers. Sororities were envisioned as service organizations as much as social clubs. Just as black clubwomen and churchwomen were leading the way in social welfare reform and racial uplift, so the early black sororities hoped to promote community service at the college level. Since the first black sororities developed at Howard University, their members already felt a sense of racial solidarity because of their ex-

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posure to Howard's atmosphere. What they hoped to achieve was experience in educational reform activities and the formation of a network of like-minded women who would ultimately form the core of national reform circles.[177]

The campus environment itself provided a context for activism and service. As noted earlier, the level of instruction in the black colleges reflected the underdevelopment of elementary and secondary educational opportunities for blacks. Forced to offer secondary instruction to students ill prepared to begin the collegiate course, Howard's academic standards were thus compromised for the first two decades of the twentieth century. Though it benefited from the fact that its distinguished faculty, including Alain Locke, Benjamin Brawley, Kelly Miller, Carter G. Woodson, Charles H. Houston, Lorenzo Turner, Ernest Just, and Charles H. Wesley, could not secure positions outside of black institutions, Howard nevertheless fell short in comparison to the top white institutions.[178] As was the case at other black liberal arts colleges, as a result of chronic underfunding, the quality of its academic programs was limited by the inadequacy of its research facilities.[179] The founders of Alpha Kappa Alpha, undoubtedly cognizant of these challenges, incorporated in the sorority's goals their vision of "keeping alive [members'] interest in college life and progressive movement emanating therefrom, for the avowed purpose of improving the social status of our race, raising moral standards, and increasing educational efficiency."[180]

## Conclusion

By combining the Greek tradition with their own vision of social reform, the founders of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority would establish community service as a distinct priority within the burgeoning black Greek-letter tradition. Similar ideals would be expressed by the founders of Delta Sigma Theta sorority (1913) and Zeta Phi Beta sorority (1920), also organized on Howard's campus, as well as by Sigma Gamma Rho, established in 1922 on the white campus of Butler University. Following Alpha Phi Alpha at Cornell and Kappa Alpha Psi at Indiana, Omega Psi Phi at Howard became, in 1911, the first black fraternity to be founded on a black campus. The establishment of Phi Beta Sigma, also at Howard in 1913, and of Iota Phi Theta in 1963 on the campus of Morgan State University, would bring to nine the family of BGLOs. This cadre of

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twentieth-century black elites would lodge protests against lynching, lobby for civil rights, campaign for literacy and social welfare, promote scholastic achievement, and serve as a mechanism for social distinction and prestige among the growing ranks of educated African Americans. In addition to national collegiate affiliates, they would spawn alumni chapters, strengthening their intergenerational community bonds and further distinguishing themselves from their white Greek counterparts.

The black Greek-letter tradition was the product of the African American struggle for recognition and respect. Despite steady gains in their material well-being, exemplified by the presence of an educated black middle class, African Americans as a group have remained outside of the mainstream of American life, tolerated but proscribed—a separate caste. Even as they began to establish their presence in elite institutions of higher learning, they faced isolation and exclusion on the white campuses of the North and white paternalistic control on the campuses established especially for them. In the context of this pervasive alienation, they turned inward for social intimacy, mutual support, and status. The BGLOs they created not only satisfied these needs but also served as symbols of their assimilation into an elite white academic tradition that further distanced them from the ordinary black masses. Despite their elitism, or perhaps because of it, the popularity of black fraternities and sororities was assured by their appeal to the sacrosanct ideal of racial uplift. Unfortunately, by limiting their vision of racial uplift to the inherently conservative concept of reform, they failed to leverage the revolutionary potential of the black educated elite to pose more radical challenges to the structure of inequality. Emblematic of the paradox of double-consciousness, BGLOs reveal the contradictions of the black quest for elite status in the midst of group oppression.

## Notes

1. When a representative of the American Missionary Association visited one of its schools in Georgia and asked what message he might take back to the North, one of the children, Richard Wright, answered, "tell them that we are rising." Wright went on to graduate from Atlanta University and to become president of the Georgia State Industrial College for Colored Youths in Savannah. Jamenns T. Haley, *Afro-American Encyclopedia* (Nashville: Haley and Florida, 1895).

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Psi was founded on the campus of Wilberforce University. Surviving copies of the *Forcean* and Wilberforce faculty minutes indicate that the organization continued at least until 1931, after which no record of its existence can be found. The 1927 *Forcean* refers to the organization as a junior fraternity, but the meaning of this designation is unclear. The limited record shows that by 1929, the organization had spawned four chapters. See Wilberforce University Faculty Minutes, December 1, 1925; *Forcean* 1923, 136; 1927, 118–19; 1929, 24–25; and 1931, 71. Special thanks go to Jacqueline Y. Brown, associate librarian and archivist at Wilberforce University, for her diligent efforts to uncover this information.

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# 6

# In the Beginning

## The Early History of the Divine Nine

*André McKenzie*

Greek-letter organizations have been part of the history of American colleges and universities since the founding of Phi Beta Kappa in 1776 at William and Mary College.[1] By 1850, national fraternity chapters were in existence at Amherst, Bowdoin, Brown, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, Western Reserve, and Miami of Ohio.[2] In 1851, at Wesleyan Female College, the first secret sisterhood for college women was established.[3] By 1910, there were thirty-two college fraternities with 1,068 active chapters.[4]

For black students attending the institutions where these organizations were present, invitations to join were not extended. Due to the pronounced racial segregation that was characteristic of the period, black students were regularly overlooked in the bid for fraternity or sorority membership. With the founding of Negro Greek-letter organizations, black students sought to emulate their white counterparts in organizational structure, while at the same time incorporating aspects of racial identification, cultural heritage, and social uplift. When commenting on their purpose, a member of one of the black fraternities wrote in 1928: "Negro college fraternities were organized to satisfy some of those yearnings that come from common sufferings and common understanding. Character, scholarship and the development of capable and intelligent leadership . . . they were to be the means of leading the Negro youth out of the slough of despond and raising him to a plane of intellectual and moral security."[5]

The fraternities that this student wrote about, along with the sororities established for female students, would come to constitute the collective membership of the collegiate black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) known as the "Divine Nine": Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma, and Iota Phi Theta fraternities and Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Zeta Phi Beta, and Sigma Gamma Rho sororities. These nine groups are discussed here in the chronological order of their founding.



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## Alpha Phi Alpha

In the fall of 1905 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, a group of black students was motivated to form a closer association among themselves than their classroom contacts would permit. As black students attending a predominantly white, Ivy League institution, these young men felt cut off from the mainstream of campus life and felt the need to establish a bond of both friendship and mutual support. Eight of these students were registered in the undergraduate schools of the university: Henry A. Callis, Vertner W. Tandy, George B. Kelley, Charles H. Chapman, Nathaniel A. Murray, Robert H. Ogle, Morgan T. Phillips, and George Tompkins. C. C. Poindexter, a graduate student, was enrolled in the College of Agriculture.[6] Later that semester, the students formed the Social Study Club and held a series of informal meetings throughout the academic year. Poindexter served as its president, and Callis assumed the role of secretary. Although the primary focus of the organization was its members' social and academic pursuits, the group was also concerned with the struggle against segregation, prejudice, and discrimination and the advancement of the members and their people.[7] Almost from its inception, however, two divergent philosophies concerning the purpose and intent of the organization were present. Some of the members desired to form a social and literary organization, while others advocated the creation of a fraternity, similar to the ones they had come to know by working as waiters at the white fraternity houses on the Cornell campus.[8] Although the Social Study Club flourished during the 1905–1906 academic year, the notion of a fraternity remained in the minds of many members.

Prior to this time, the Social Study Club had gone unnamed. Callis is credited with coming up with the name Alpha Phi Alpha, which was adopted informally at a meeting in March 1906 and formally approved on May 23. Advertising themselves in the town of Ithaca as "A. Phi A.," the group sponsored a dance before the close of the spring semester.[9] During the following school year, 1906–1907, the idea of a fraternity took on a more definitive shape. Minutes from the October 27, 1906, meeting of the society show that the members again voted on the name Alpha Phi Alpha, this time acknowledging a more fraternal influence by stating, "henceforth the group [will] be known by these three *Greek* letters." Other business approved at the meeting included the adoption of old gold and black as the club colors.[10]

The first initiation of new members took place three days later on October 30 at the Masonic Hall (also referred to as Odd Fellows Hall and Red Men's

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Hall). The three initiates were Eugene Kinckle Jones, Lemuel Graves, and Gordon Jones.[11] Although this initiation clearly showed a leaning toward a more fraternal type of organization, the members still had not formally decided whether they would be a literary society or a full-fledged fraternity. The question was squarely raised at a meeting on November 6, 1906, but went unresolved. Poindexter, president of the group and an ardent proponent of the literary society idea, was reported to have said that he knew of no "historical background" on which to base a fraternity. Nathaniel A. Murray, recalling those early years of development, wrote of Poindexter, "when the idea of organizing a colored fraternity was suggested, he immediately did all he could to discourage the idea."[12] The subject was on the agenda again at the society's next meeting held a week later, and there was a split vote. As presiding officer, Poindexter cast the deciding ballot in favor of the literary organization. No doubt realizing the inevitability of the society's move toward a fraternal orientation, Poindexter was absent from the group's next meeting on December 4, 1906, and Callis read Poindexter's letter of resignation to those assembled. It was at this historic meeting that the majority voted for the organization to become a fraternity. The seven founders, designated "Jewels" by the organization, were Henry A. Callis, Charles H. Chapman, Eugene K. Jones, George B. Kelley, Nathaniel A. Murray, Robert H. Ogle, and Vertner W. Tandy.[13] In his book *Black Greek 101*, Walter Kimbrough gives Alpha Phi Alpha the distinction of being the first *continuous* intercollegiate BGLO, noting that attempts at black fraternalism at Indiana University and Wilberforce University predated the founding of Alpha Phi Alpha.[14]

During the early days of its existence, many on the Cornell campus and in the local community thought the notion of a black fraternity was a foolhardy one. Founder Murray recounts hearing insults directed toward the group, such as: "You will be the laughing stock of the town," "You cannot hope to do what white folks do," and "You will lose your jobs as waiters if you try to imitate your employer."[15]

The neophyte members of "Greekdom" wanted more than a traditional fraternity. Callis recounted in a 1952 article that appeared in the *Sphinx*, the fraternity's journal, "Alpha Phi Alpha was born in the shadows of slavery, on the lap of disfranchisement. We proposed . . . to bring leadership and vision to the social problems of our communities and the nation."[16] Though acknowledging the influence of W. E. B. DuBois and the Niagara Movement on the formation of Alpha Phi Alpha, Callis added, "our job ahead required a fellowship which would embrace those millions outside of the 'talented tenth.'"[17]

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## Alpha Kappa Alpha

The inspiration for and "moving spirit" of Alpha Kappa Alpha was Ethel Hedgeman, a native of St. Louis, Missouri. Established on the campus of Howard University in January 1908, the organization was the first Greek-letter sorority created by black college women. According to Marjorie H. Parker, the organization's historian, the founding of the sorority is often related to the establishment of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity's Beta chapter at the university in December 1907.[18] Hedgeman's high school sweetheart (and later husband), George Lyle, was a member of the Beta chapter.[19] Any influence he had was minimal, however, and Hedgeman sought guidance on the idea of a sorority from two of her instructors, Ethel T. Robinson and Elizabeth Appo Cook. Robinson was particularly interested in the idea of Greek-letter societies for women and often shared with Hedgeman her sorority experiences as an undergraduate at Brown University.[20]

In the fall of 1907, Hedgeman, described as a "brilliant student with a strong personality," returned to Howard to begin her junior year. It was during this period that she began a series of discussions with friends concerning the establishment of a sorority. Both interested and intrigued by her idea, they carefully considered the possibilities of such an organization. Hedgeman, along with eight other students—Beulah and Lillie Burke, Margaret Flagg Holmes, Marjorie Hill, Lucy Slowe, Marie Woolfolk Taylor, Anna Easter Brown, and Lavinia Norman—constituted the group of nine who would lay the groundwork for the preliminary organization.[21]

On January 15, 1908, the young coeds met in a small room in Miner Hall, the women's dormitory. At that meeting, Hedgeman was elected temporary chairwoman of the organization, and committees were established to complete the constitution and decide on a name, motto, and colors for the sorority.[22] The next step for the organization was to gain official recognition from the university's administration. Accordingly, Hedgeman and Woolfolk were selected to meet with Howard's president, Dr. Wilbur Thirkield, and the deans, Lewis Moore and Kelly Miller, to present the group's plan and constitution. The permission the two young women sought was granted "without delay."[23]

At the organization's next meeting on February 21, 1908, reports from the various committees were given. Beulah Burke, a student of Greek studies, recommended that Alpha Kappa Alpha be the name of the organization. The three letters, AKA, represented the first letters of the three Greek words that formed the motto of the sorority, "by culture and by merit." The recommended colors

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for the group were salmon pink and apple green, representing abundance of life, womanliness, fidelity, and love. Hedgeman, whose task had been to propose a symbol and its design, recommended that the ivy leaf be adopted as the organization's insignia. All recommendations were accepted.[24] The group then elected its first set of officers. Due to a provision in the organization's constitution that limited the presidency to a member of the senior class, Hedgeman, the most obvious candidate for the position, was ineligible. Slowe was elected president, and Woolfolk and Brown assumed the offices of secretary and treasurer, respectively. Anticipating the graduation of six of its members, the group also decided that students from the sophomore class who had expressed an interest in an organization such as theirs should be approached for membership. Seven young women from the class of 1910—Joanna Berry, Norma Boyd, Ethel Jones, Sarah Meriweather, Alice Murray, Carrie Snowden, and Harriet Terry—were admitted to the sorority without initiation in late February 1908. These sixteen women, the original nine and the seven sophomores of 1908, would come to be recognized and honored collectively as the founders of Alpha Kappa Alpha.[25] The sorority's first ritualistic initiation took place approximately one year later on February 11, 1909, in Miner Hall when six more young women were admitted to the organization's ranks: Ella Albert Brown, Mary Clifford, Lena Jenkins, Mable Gibson, Ruth Gilbert, and Nellie Pratt Russell.[26]

The young women of Alpha Kappa Alpha were determined to make their imprint on the Howard campus. In addition to their contributions in both academic and social arenas, the sorority members sponsored cultural presentations for the general public and involved themselves in volunteer activities in the Washington, D.C., area. One of their early activities, which would later become an annual tradition, was the celebration of Ivy Day. Inaugurated on May 25, 1909, the purpose of Ivy Day was to inform those gathered about the goals and ideals of Alpha Kappa Alpha and to provide personal inspiration and reflection for its members. As part of the celebration, ivy was ceremoniously planted around the Howard campus to serve as a visible reminder of the enduring spirit of the sorority.[27]

In the fall of 1912, Alpha Kappa Alpha faced the greatest crisis of its young history, with its very existence as an organization at stake. Ironically, the crisis emanated from within. Myra Davis, president of the organization, was spearheading a group of dissatisfied members in an attempt to reorganize Alpha Kappa Alpha (these efforts are discussed in more detail in the section on Delta Sigma Theta). Nellie Quander, a June 1912 graduate of Howard who had served

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as president of Alpha Kappa Alpha prior to Davis's election, was "horrified" when she arrived at the organization's regularly scheduled meeting that fall and discovered that the agenda included the adoption of a new name, motto, colors, and symbol for the sorority.[28] Moving swiftly, she galvanized the support of those members who remained in allegiance with the original organization and wanted to preserve its distinct characteristics. She also contacted every woman who had been a member of the sorority to apprise them of the unsettling events unfolding on campus and to solicit their feedback. Quander's leadership, with assistance from Norma Boyd and Minnie B. Smith, set in motion a plan of preservation and expansion that led to the chartering of Alpha Kappa Alpha on the Howard campus and its incorporation on January 29, 1913, under the Code of Laws of the District of Columbia. Incorporation afforded the organization the rights of a perpetual body, with the "power to organize, institute, and charter subordinate chapters."[29] Davis and twenty-one other members of the group went on to form another organization, Delta Sigma Theta sorority.[30]

At a 1934 founders' day celebration of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Ethel Hedgeman (Lyle) paid tribute to Quander and the others who had paved the way for incorporation: "there is still another group, to whom this Founders Day should mean a great deal—more than to the rest of us, when it was all but destroyed by treachery and faithlessness. Their loyalty to the pledge to Alpha Kappa Alpha kept the torch of our ideals lighted . . . I gladly pay this tribute . . . to all those others who saw the need for immediate action, and did the thing most necessary."[31]

## Kappa Alpha Psi

As the 1910 academic year opened on the campus of Indiana University, a determined group of black undergraduate men looked to form an organization as a way to address the racial inequities and social isolation they faced as students at the predominantly white, midwestern institution. In *The Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* William L. Crump writes of their early experience: "assimilation into the life of the school was impossible. The administration maintained an attitude of indifference as blacks were slowly matriculated and swiftly forgotten."[32] Segregationist practices of the period denied black students the use of campus entertainment and recreational facilities. Their involvement in university athletic programs was confined solely to track and

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field; participation in any contact sport was absolutely prohibited. It was here in Bloomington, Indiana, under such adverse circumstances, that the second Greek-letter fraternity organized by black college men was founded.[33] Nine young men would lay the foundation for what would become Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity: Elder Watson Diggs, Ezra D. Alexander, Byron K. Armstrong, Henry T. Asher, Paul Caine, Guy L. Grant, Edward G. Irvin, John M. Lee, and Marcus P. Blakemore. Alpha Omega was chosen as the temporary name for the organization until the details of a Greek-letter society could be more fully formulated.[34]

The idea for the establishment of a Greek-letter organization for Negro men on the Indiana campus actually originated some 1,000 miles away at Howard University in Washington, D.C. During the previous academic year, 1909–1910, Elder Watson Diggs and Byron K. Armstrong had been enrolled at Howard and, according to Crump, had been approached about joining a fraternity there. Both declined to pledge, however, because "they disapproved [of] the attitudes and actions of certain members."[35] The fraternity in question was no doubt Alpha Phi Alpha, whose Beta chapter, established on December 20, 1907, was the only fraternity on the Howard campus at the time.[36] Although it is just as plausible that Diggs and Armstrong had sought membership in the organization and been denied, there is no mention of the incident in a review of Alpha Phi Alpha historical sources. At the close of the 1910 spring term, Armstrong had traveled to Indiana University to visit a cousin who was a student there. Impressed by what he saw, he had persuaded Diggs, who also hailed from Indiana, to join him in transferring to the university.[37]

At Indiana, subsequent meetings and discussions among the nine men revealed their mutual interest in establishing a fraternity. As they worked to bring a common goal to fruition, their bonds were strengthened, and "the depressing isolation earlier experienced was relieved as friendships solidified."[38] On January 5, 1911, the group met with the sole intent of creating a permanent organization. With that achieved, Diggs was named permanent chairman; John Lee, secretary; and Byron Armstrong, sergeant at arms. Although they were enthusiastic about the fraternal idea, the fledgling "Greeks" knew very little about such organizations. The sum of their knowledge came primarily from the experiences of those who worked as waiters in the dining halls of the white fraternity houses. Regardless of this somewhat limited perspective, it was enough for them to acknowledge the potential worth of such a group for black college men and to set the wheels in motion for the development of their own organization. Diggs and Armstrong took the lead in this task. The two

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studied Greek heraldry and Greek mythology to prepare them for the creation of the ritual, insignia, emblem, and other needed items. By the end of the school year, the Alpha Omega group had officially become Kappa Alpha Nu fraternity. The ten founders of the organization included the nine young men identified earlier and George Edmonds, a classmate who had entered the university in the fall of 1910. Planning from the outset that their organization would be incorporated and national in scope, an application was filed in the state of Indiana. The actual date of incorporation was May 15, 1911.[39]

The early days of Kappa Alpha Nu were far from easy, as obstacles seemed to hinder every move. The members were unable to secure meeting places, even in their own rooming houses. The organization was refused a charter and went totally unrecognized by the university's administration. Through sheer persistence and resolve, they were eventually granted *some* of the privileges afforded their white classmates. When asked to recall those early days of the organization, one of the fraternity's founders reminisced that the word "guts" best described what was required in the face of such overwhelming odds.[40] Trying to secure a house for the organization was a particularly difficult task, since no one wanted to live near a bunch of "yelling, ignorant savages," as they were called. For a long time, it seemed as if the attitude was, "Don't sell to Negroes." This eventually changed, and they were able to rent a small house.[41]

The fraternity began a program of expansion with the establishment of its second chapter, Beta, at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana in February 1913. Subsequent chapters were initiated at the University of Iowa and Wilberforce University in 1914 and 1915, respectively.[42] When Diggs overheard a white student referring to Kappa Alpha Nu as "Kappa Alpha Nig," it was evident that the alphabetical designation for the fraternity—KAN—had become an issue. On April 15, 1915, Kappa Alpha Nu became known as Kappa Alpha Psi.[43] The evolutionary path begun by the small band of students at Indiana University in 1910—from Alpha Omega to Kappa Alpha Nu to Kappa Alpha Psi—was finally complete.

## Omega Psi Phi

Historically, the development of BGLOs at predominantly white colleges and universities has been viewed as a somewhat natural occurrence. Experiencing a sense of isolation and social ostracism, black students attending such institutions established their organizations not only to foster mutual support for

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academic and social pursuits but also to cope with the challenges and obstacles they faced in overcoming the prevailing racial codes and mores. On the Negro campus, however, different issues came into play in the development of such groups. In a 1919 article in the *Howard University Record*, Numa Adams commented, "In the Negro colleges, the fraternities developed among different groups of young men, each group having certain likes and dislikes in common."[44] The same forces that fueled the development of rival white social fraternities on the American college campus—differences in class, background, tastes, and social status—were also at work at black institutions. The establishment of Omega Psi Phi in 1911, the first national Greek-letter fraternity founded at a Negro institution, was the result of such forces at Howard University. Prior to its creation, the only fraternity at Howard was the Beta chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha.[45] In Howard's 1914 undergraduate yearbook, the *Nikh*, the entry under Omega Psi Phi reads: "It was the aim of the founders to establish a fraternity in which a larger number of men could share the fruits of fraternity life than had hitherto been able to do so."[46] More specifically, it was said that Alpha Phi Alpha had become "an exclusive social set that was accused of snobbishness toward the darker students and those not from prominent families."[47]

The founders of Omega Psi Phi, known on campus as the "Three Musketeers," were Edgar A. Love, Oscar Cooper, and Frank Coleman. Returning to Howard in the fall of 1911 to begin their junior year, Love and Cooper had a series of discussions regarding the creation of a Greek-letter fraternity. Coleman, a close friend of both men, was subsequently invited to join the two in their endeavor. The group then sought guidance from one of Howard's young faculty members, associate professor of biology Ernest E. Just, who readily agreed to serve as their adviser. The group held a meeting on November 15, 1911, to consider the advisability of organizing a national Greek-letter fraternity on the Howard campus. Reaction to the idea was quite favorable. It was decided, however, that more research needed to be done on the subject. Utilizing the resources of the university library, the public library, and the Library of Congress, the three students found valuable information on the fraternity movement and its traditions, as well as a number of commentaries written by those critical of such organizations, many of them voicing the specific concerns of university faculty and administrators.[48]

Two days later, on the evening of November 17, 1911, the group gathered in Just's office in Science Hall, discussed the matter thoroughly, and decided to commit themselves formally to the establishment of a fraternity. The name chosen for the organization, Omega Psi Phi, was formed from the initials of

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the Greek phrase meaning "Friendship is essential to the soul." The group adopted four cardinal principles: manhood, scholarship, perseverance, and uplift. The design for the pin and escutcheon were also decided on.[49] The dream of a fraternity had been realized, but not without a great deal of thought and contemplation on the part of its founders. Such a decision weighed heavily on their minds, particularly with regard to the impact such an organization might have on its members. In a 1929 article appearing in the *Oracle*, the fraternity's journal, Walter Mazyck recounts their early questions and doubts: "More than once did these pioneers of Omega ask themselves whether it would make its members broad or narrow in their views toward the world that surrounded them; whether it would promote a Spirit of Sacrifice for common good or one of selfishness in dealing with their fellow men. They saw both sides and still their dream was luminous."[50]

Membership began to grow almost immediately. Twenty-eight days after the organization's founding, eleven undergraduate men were selected from among the Howard student body to constitute the first chapter, Alpha. The next order of business was the creation of a constitution, which would then be submitted to Howard president, Dr. Wilbur P. Thirkield, for faculty approval. On March 8, 1912, the fraternity received word that the University Council, the governing body that oversaw such matters, had rejected its proposal. The council would allow only local recognition, not national, as its members had requested. Faculty resistance to the establishment of a national fraternity was not unexpected. The members of Omega Psi Phi realized that Howard was a Negro institution in a city with a strong southern tradition. The establishment of a secret society, such as the one they were proposing, would be met with a high degree of suspicion.[51] Nevertheless, the founders persisted in their dealings with the council to push for national status. Because faculty approval was coming a bit too slowly, members of the fraternity arose early one morning and covered the entire campus with three- by six-inch placards announcing the birth of a new fraternity. President Thirkield, who both denounced their actions and denied the existence of any such organization, reprimanded them.[52] Many conferences and meetings would take place between the faculty and the members of Omega Psi Phi before the organization would ultimately be granted approval. This process was finally complete when the fraternity was incorporated in the District of Columbia on October 28, 1914.[53] The unwavering belief of the young founders in their dream for Omega Psi Phi stands as a true testament to their spirit, perseverance, and resolve.

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## Delta Sigma Theta

Delta Sigma Theta sorority was founded on the campus of Howard University in January 1913 by former members of Alpha Kappa Alpha. In the fall of 1912, Alpha Kappa Alpha found itself composed of two distinct groups: a group of younger undergraduate women who were active in campus life, and a group of older students (and recent graduates) whose days were divided between student teaching in the mornings and attending classes in the afternoons.[54]

The younger members of the sorority, led by president Myra Davis, had become dissatisfied with the purpose and direction of the organization. A number of factors contributed to their discontent. First and foremost was their desire for the sorority to adopt a more service-oriented focus and to address the social concerns of the day, particularly those that impacted the rights of women.[55] Delta Sigma Theta founder Osceola McCarthy Adams recalled that the spirit of the times (in particular, the women's suffrage movement) was a driving force behind Delta's formation. She specifically noted, "Our special awakening came then, our social consciousness evolved . . . we couldn't help being aware of it and drawn into it."[56]

There were other issues as well. The younger members envisioned the establishment of a national organization that was broad in scope and would link them with like-minded college women across the country. They desired an organization that would transcend the traditional social aspects of Greek-letter societies and provide its members with continued opportunities for community service, activism, and fellowship after they left school.[57] Paula Giddings writes, "the sorority had no legal entity, was unincorporated, and had neither a charter nor the power to form other chapters."[58] Alpha Kappa Alpha, in its current state, was not meeting the needs of this particular element of the sorority. A plan of reorganization was soon in the making.

It was Madree Penn who first approached Davis with the idea of changing the sorority's name, motto, colors, and symbols.[59] Many of the younger members felt that the name Alpha Kappa Alpha was merely a derivative of Alpha Phi Alpha and had no unique significance of its own. Some felt that the letters themselves—AKA—failed to denote any real semblance of Greek character. The new name, Delta Sigma Theta, had been chosen after consulting with E. P. Davis, the students' professor of Greek, and represented the first letters of the proposed organization's secret motto. Crimson and cream, which denoted courage and purity, were the proposed colors. The official flower of the sorority

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would be the African violet, which symbolized modesty; the purple and gold varieties would represent the special bond between the young women and the members of Omega Psi Phi, the newest fraternity on Howard's campus.[60] Two of the young women, Edith Young and Edna Brown, were involved in personal relationships with founding members of Omega Psi Phi. Myra Davis confided in Omega founder Edgar Love about her group's dissatisfaction and their strategy for reorganization. Giddings speculates that the members of Omega Psi Phi, having gone through the recognition process, may have advised the women on what course to pursue in their attempt to create a national organization.[61]

Attending the fall 1912 meeting of Alpha Kappa Alpha were the twenty-two younger, undergraduate members of the sorority and Nellie Quander, a graduate member. When Quander heard the proposal for reorganization, she became the "lone dissenter" among a sea of change-seekers. She vehemently opposed the recommendations and persuaded the undergraduates to table their approval of the reorganization plan. Quander then issued a deadline to the group, by which time they were to cease their Delta Sigma Theta action and resume participation in Alpha Kappa Alpha. In the meantime, Quander set in motion a series of actions that ultimately led to the perpetuity of Alpha Kappa Alpha.[62] The twenty-two undergraduate members subsequently withdrew from Alpha Kappa Alpha and moved forward in establishing their own organization.[63]

Their first priority was to secure approval and recognition from the university's board of trustees. Although the young women filed the charter application in December 1912, the application was not considered until the school reopened in January 1913, following the Christmas holidays. The charter was received shortly thereafter on January 13, 1913, recognized as the founding date of Delta Sigma Theta sorority. It received incorporation under the laws of the District of Columbia on February 18, 1913. Myra Davis, who had been president of Alpha Kappa Alpha, now headed the new sorority.[64] The founders of the organization were Osceola McCarthy (Adams), Marguerite Young (Alexander), Winona Cargile (Alexander), Ethel Cuff (Black), Bertha Pitts (Campbell), Zephyr Chisom (Carter), Edna Brown (Coleman), Jessie McGuire (Dent), Frederica Chase (Dodd), Myra Davis (Hemmings), Olive C. Jones, Jimmie Bugg (Middleton), Pauline Oberdorfer (Minor), Vashti Turley (Murphy), Naomi Sewell (Richardson), Mamie Reddy (Rose), Eliza P. Shippen, Florence Lechter (Toms), Ethel Carr (Watson), Wertie Blackwell (Weaver), Madree Penn (White), and Edith Motte (Young).[65]

The Howard campus was soon made aware of the new sorority. Approxi-

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mately one month after its founding, an article appeared in the *Howard University Journal* with the following announcement: "Realizing that there was no true sorority in Howard University, and desiring to form one which would measure favorably with any secret organization, anywhere, the active members of an existing club by unanimous consent reorganized into a chartered organization . . . Alpha Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority of Howard University."[66]

On March 3, 1913, less than two months after its founding, the members of Delta Sigma Theta were marching down Washington's Pennsylvania Avenue alongside thousands of other supporters of the women's suffrage movement. The young coeds held high the banner of Delta Sigma Theta as they strode proudly in the historic "right to vote" parade that sought political equity for women.[67]

## Phi Beta Sigma

The primary architect and guiding light of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity was A. Langston Taylor, "a tall, lanky lad" from Memphis, Tennessee. During the summer of 1910, Taylor met a young man who had recently graduated from Howard University and, since he was planning to attend Howard that fall, Taylor was quite interested in what the gentleman had to say about the university and its activities. His interest was particularly piqued by what he heard about the campus's Greek-letter organizations. Taylor would later relate the significance of that conversation, saying, "His talk gave me an idea, and from that day on, Phi Beta Sigma was in the making."[68] Rather than contemplating affiliation with an existing organization at Howard, Taylor had already carved out in his mind the creation of another.

Taylor entered Howard on November 23, 1910. He soon realized, however, that the work of organizing a fraternity, not to mention the time commitment, was a much harder task than he had expected, but he refused to be deterred from his ultimate goal. Finally, in October 1913, Taylor shared with Leonard F. Morse, a former roommate, his idea of organizing a new fraternity and invited him to be a partner in its founding. Morse accepted, and the two later agreed that a close friend and fellow student, Charles I. Brown, would be the third member of the founding group. In November 1913, the three students gathered at Taylor's home for their first meeting.[69] At subsequent meetings, nine other classmates agreed to become members of the organization. Morse later

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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wrote that these nine men were different in temperament, ability, and appearance, which was precisely why the founders chose them.[70]

The young organizers met on the evening of Friday, January 9, 1914, at the local YMCA to give "full and solemn consideration" to the proposal of establishing a new fraternity. Taylor reported on his efforts over the past three years to develop a plan of organization and recommended the formation of a permanent organization to be known as Phi Beta Sigma fraternity. The recommendation was approved. The group of twelve—the three founders and the remaining nine—would be recognized as the organization's charter members. The election of officers also took place that evening, with Taylor, Brown, and Morse being elected national president, national vice president, and national secretary, respectively.[71] Morse, a student of Greek, was credited with suggesting the name of the fraternity, whose Greek letters stand for brotherhood, scholarship, and service.[72]

Although the new members of Phi Beta Sigma reveled in their new status, they were well aware that official recognition of the organization would have to come from the university's Board of Deans, and they were, no doubt, also aware of the struggle Omega Psi Phi had faced in gaining such recognition. Perhaps to avoid similar difficulties, the members of Phi Beta Sigma kept their organizing activities "underground"—no public statement concerning the fraternity was made. Taylor even assured the members that if their efforts proved unsuccessful at Howard, they would look to establish their first chapter at another institution.[73] In late January 1914, the members of Phi Beta Sigma submitted a petition to the Board of Deans seeking recognition and permission to establish a chapter at Howard. The administration's response revealed a marked change in attitude toward the formation of Greek-letter societies. Formal approval was granted to the organization on April 15, 1914, less than three months after the petition had been received.[74] A news release from the April 24, 1914, edition of the *Howard University Journal* announced the arrival of the new fraternity.[75]

The following month, the fraternity conducted its first initiation ceremony, where fourteen candidates were accepted into membership.[76] Members of Phi Beta Sigma were engaged in all aspects of campus life. In 1915, the *Mirror,* Howard's undergraduate yearbook, contained the following narrative on the organization: "Though the youngest of all the fraternity chapters located at Howard University, this frat is taking no small part in all university life and activities."[77] Its house, located on Third Street, Northwest, became the talk of the campus. Described as "one of the largest and best equipped of the Frat

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Houses," it had "a well equipped library and art gallery, both of which are open to the public."[78]

Moving ahead with a plan of expansion, Phi Beta Sigma established its second chapter at Wiley College on November 13, 1915. Approximately one month later, the fraternity received a typewritten letter dated December 11, 1915, from Elder W. Diggs, grand polemarch of Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity, in which Diggs proposed a merger of the two organizations. After careful consideration, Taylor, in a "graceful reply," informed Diggs that Phi Beta Sigma's general board had voted to decline his proposal.[79] During this period, the fraternity established its third chapter at Morgan State College. By the time it held its first annual conclave in December 1916, Phi Beta Sigma possessed much of the form and function of an established fraternity. Its motto, "Culture for Service, Service for Humanity," coined in 1915, had endowed the young men with high aspirations that would serve in "leading the fraternity on to noble achievements."[80]

## Zeta Phi Beta

As they casually strolled across the campus of Howard University in the spring of 1919, Charles Robert Samuel Taylor shared a secret with Arizona Cleaver, the young woman he was dating. Up to this point, he had not discussed his idea with anyone—not even the members of his fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma. Taylor's idea was the creation of a sorority that would be the sister organization to Phi Beta Sigma. He wanted Cleaver to play an integral role in its development because she had "character and gifts . . . a beautiful spirit and intellectual effectiveness . . . appeal in her personality and in her words." He also knew that if he "won her, she would not give up until she had perfected a nucleus of a sisterhood for Phi Beta Sigma."[81]

Taylor's bold proposition was a risky one. There were already two established sororities at Howard: Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta. Female students interested in affiliating with a sorority looked forward to joining one of those, "providing they were fortunate enough to be the recipient of an invitation."[82] Taylor realized that stimulating interest in the formation of a new sorority would be a difficult task, and he wondered how such a group "would find a place that was not filled by either of the two sororities then active on the campus."[83] His fears were quickly overcome by Cleaver's thoughtful consideration and enthusiastic response. Inspired by his plan, she hurriedly returned

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to the women's dormitory, Miner Hall, and shared the details of their conversation with her close friend Pearl Neal. A music major from North Carolina, Neal, too, was excited by the prospect of a new sorority and agreed to work with Cleaver. It was obvious to both of them that there was room for another sorority at Howard. Lullelia Harrison, in *Torchbearers of a Legacy,* notes that the founders of Zeta Phi Beta believed that the elitism of the existing sororities, as well as their overemphasis on social activities, failed to adequately capture the mission of more progressive organizations. It was their intention to establish a sorority that would address more substantive issues germane to society in general, and the black community in particular.[84]

Although this could be considered a noble goal, it was comparable to the organizational thrust espoused by Delta Sigma Theta. It appears, however, that the perception of sorority elitism played a significant role in the creation of Zeta Phi Beta. Harrison asserts that the existing sororities "sometimes employed such superficial traits as physical appearance and economic status as criteria for membership."[85] Bemoaning the fact that "many fine young women were not extended an invitation to membership in some organizations," she states that because the founders of Zeta Phi Beta "were not 'color struck' nor limited by the barriers of other biases, the doors were open to all women who saw academic achievement as the true accomplishment of the college experience."[86] Personal attitudes regarding the nature of pledging may have played a role as well. One of the founders of Zeta recalled that although she had friends in both of the existing sororities, she "could not become a friend's maid in order to become a pledge. I thought that zeal or active interest should surpass submissiveness."[87]

Cleaver and Neal went about the task of identifying like-minded women interested in the creation of a new sisterhood on the Howard campus. They initially approached women who had been passed over by the two existing sororities or had otherwise been unable to affiliate with them. As a result of their efforts, the number of interested students reached fourteen.[88] Early meetings of the group were held in dormitory rooms in Miner Hall. Although males were officially prohibited from being in the rooms of female students, Taylor was present at those initial meetings. He recalled that the matron of Miner Hall never even realized that he was in the building until she saw him being escorted out by Cleaver, her assistant.[89]

Those first two meetings of the interest group were described as "well attended," and the women left "full of enthusiasm." However, by the time the third meeting convened, there had been an abrupt decline in membership,

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attributed to a number of factors. First of all, when the purpose of the group's secret meetings leaked out to the campus community, the women quickly became the target of scorn and ridicule. The April 1929 issue of the *Crescent*, the journal of Phi Beta Sigma, observed that "those who did not see the true vision were unable to stand the jeers of the crowd who called them 'The Praying Band,' and other laughable names."[90] Second, a rumor was being spread across campus that membership in the budding sorority would require extremely high academic grades. Believing that they would be unable to meet the sorority's academic standards, some of the women, fearing embarrassment, withdrew from the group. Last, there was a nominal fee involved, and those who were unable to afford the requisite amount also left the organization. After the exodus, four hopeful young women remained steadfast to the mission of creating a new sorority: Arizona Cleaver, Pearl Neal, and the Tyler sisters, Myrtle and Viola.[91]

Having just four members created a problem for the group. University policy required that any student organization seeking official recognition have a minimum of five members. That fifth member appeared in the person of Fannie Pettie, a Georgia native who readily accepted Myrtle Tyler's invitation to join the group.[92] In December 1919, A. Langston Taylor, one of the founders of Phi Beta Sigma, was authorized at the fraternity's annual conclave to assist in the organization of the sorority. He, along with Charles Robert Samuel Taylor (no relation), provided support and counsel to the small but dedicated group of women.[93]

Cleaver was chosen to present the group's request for recognition to the university administration, and official permission to establish a third sorority on the Howard campus was granted in January 1920. The first meeting of the newly established group took place on January 16, acknowledged as its date of founding. It was there that the members chose Zeta Phi Beta as the name for its sorority: Zeta, representing zeal, Phi, for scholarship, and Beta, for sisterly love. Arizona Cleaver (Stemons), Pearl Neal, Myrtle Tyler (Faithful), Viola Tyler (Goings), and Fannie Pettie (Watts), along with Charles Robert Samuel Taylor and A. Langston Taylor, are recognized as the founders of the sorority.[94] A constitution and bylaws were drawn up for the organization, based on the constitution of Phi Beta Sigma. The preamble to the sorority's constitution reads: "We, a group of college women organized as a sister group to Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, do hereby bind ourselves together for the purpose of: 1) Furthering the cause of education by encouraging the highest standards of scholarship among college women; 2) Uplifting worthwhile projects on college campuses

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and within communities in which we may be located; and 3) Furthering the spirit of sisterly love and promoting the ideals of finer womanhood."[95]

The five young founders sought to expand the membership of their infant sorority, and twenty-five pledges were soon ready to join their ranks. Ultimately, however, there would be only four in the organization's first group of initiates: Harriet Dorsey, Pauline Phillips, Nellie Singfield, and Gladys Warrington. The sorority made its formal debut at a reception sponsored by A. Langston Taylor and Charles Robert Samuel Taylor at the Whitelaw, a Washington, D.C., hotel. Shortly thereafter, they received another formal introduction, this time from their sorority peers. The women of Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta sororities hosted a "Welcome to Campus" reception in the assembly room of Miner Hall in recognition of the establishment of Zeta Phi Beta. Described as "elegant," the event signaled the beginning of Zeta Phi Beta's influence on the Howard campus and beyond.[96]

## Sigma Gamma Rho

The youngest of the four black Greek-letter sororities, Sigma Gamma Rho holds the distinction of being the only one not established at Howard University. Founded on the predominantly white campus of Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana, the sorority was the brainchild of Mary Lou Allison (Little). Allison, a teacher in the Indianapolis public schools, conceived the idea of creating a sisterhood of the city's teachers in 1920.[97]

During this period, most teachers were graduates of normal schools, two-year institutions specifically devoted to the training of teachers. Many, however, chose to continue their education at four-year institutions that awarded baccalaureate degrees. This was the case for Allison, an Indianapolis native, and the six "ambitious and independent" friends she called to her home to discuss the idea of forming a Greek-letter organization for teachers. The six women were Bessie Mae Downey, Hattie Dulin, Nannie Mae Gahn, Dorothy Hanley, Cubena McClure, and Vivian White. Six of this group, including Allison, had graduated from the normal school in Indianapolis, and the seventh had completed her studies at the normal school at Terre Haute, Indiana. All were now enrolled in coursework at Butler University.[98]

During the fall of 1922, the group met almost nightly and on Saturdays to hammer out the details of becoming a Greek-letter organization. On November 12, 1922, the seven women established themselves as the Alpha chapter of

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Sigma Gamma Rho sorority. Less than a month later, on December 6, 1922, the organization was incorporated under the laws of the state of Indiana. Although Sigma Gamma Rho was known as a professional sorority for teachers in its early years, in 1925, the group's constitution was amended to allow membership to "desirable young people, regardless of professional interest." Additionally, all potential candidates were required to have completed a minimum of two years of college work with a "commendable average as an all around student."[99]

The first few years of its existence were formative ones for Sigma Gamma Rho. It was during this period that the women focused on their identity as a Greek-letter organization and went about creating symbols and other distinct characteristics for the sorority. Royal blue and gold were chosen as the group's colors, and the tea rose was selected as the sorority flower. A coat of arms was designed, and a national hymn was composed. Gahn (Johnson) and McClure are credited with designing the official sorority badge: an open book, representing knowledge, with a torch as its foundation; ten pearls, symbolizing the seven founders and the three virtues of faith, hope, and love, along with two rubies, representing light and achievement, adorn the base. In 1925, Sigma Gamma Rho convened its first national boulé in Indianapolis, where the sorority adopted as its slogan "Greater Progress, Greater Service" (later changed to "Greater Service, Greater Progress"). This meeting also witnessed Allison's election as the organization's first basileus, or president; prior to that time, she had served as acting basileus.[100] Although the criteria for membership eligibility had been expanded, the sorority's primary focus was still the concerns of those employed in the field of education.

During the late 1920s, the continued expansion of chapters and membership became a main concern for the young organization. Sorority member Delight Hinton wrote in 1928 that the organization's expansion goals were threefold: (1) to secure total cooperation and loyalty in its membership, (2) to sell Sigma Gamma Rho to the public, and (3) to expand with the help of strong organizers with definite plans.[101]

At its fourth annual boulé held in 1929 in Cleveland, Ohio, Sigma Gamma Rho boasted a roster of eighteen undergraduate chapters and four graduate chapters. However, only one of the chapters was actually based on a college campus; the rest were established in various cities across the nation. In fact, it was not until December 30, 1929—more than seven years after its founding—that the sorority was granted a charter at Butler University, the very institution where it had been established. This failure to meet the minimum number of

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campus-based chapters resulted in Sigma Gamma Rho's withdrawal in 1930 from the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), the umbrella organization established by members of the eight existing black Greek-letter fraternities and sororities. As Pearl White describes, "the business of establishing campus chapters became a priority of the sorority."[102]

In taking the necessary steps to meet the eligibility requirements for membership in the NPHC, Sigma Gamma Rho once again modified its constitution, formally changing from a normal sorority (for teachers) to a national collegiate sorority. The members also decided that two years of normal training was insufficient for potential members and required future candidates to be enrolled in a four-year college or university.[103] Since its founding in 1922, Sigma Gamma Rho has grown from a small, dedicated group of Indiana teachers to a vast national organization of women from a variety of professional fields who continue to keep "Greater Service, Greater Progress" central to their mission.

## Iota Phi Theta

For nearly fifty years, four organizations—Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, and Phi Beta Sigma—symbolized the collegiate black Greek-letter fraternity experience in America. With the founding of Iota Phi Theta on September 19, 1963, this select cadre grew to five. On the campus of Morgan State College (now Morgan State University), a historically black institution in Baltimore, Maryland, twelve students endeavored to form an organization whose purpose would be "the development and perpetuation of scholarship, leadership, citizenship, fidelity, and brotherhood among men." The founders of the fraternity included Charles Briscoe, Charles Brown, Frank Coakley, Elias Dorsey, Charles Gregory, Albert Hicks, Louis Hudnell, Webster Lewis, John Slade, Lonnie Spruill Jr., Michael Williams, and Barron Willis.[104] Slade indicated that making the American dream a reality was the motivating factor behind the fraternity's establishment—wanting to form a national fraternity that would impact America on the whole, not just African America.[105]

The development of Iota Phi Theta can be seen as both a reflection of the time in which it was founded—the turbulent 1960s—and an attempt to address the innate desire of individuals "to associate with like-minded comrades."[106] In the 1960s, many viewed fraternities in general, and black fraternal organizations in particular, as anachronistic.[107] Slade explains that although the traditional black Greek-letter fraternities were active on the Morgan cam-

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pus, "the founders of Iota could not connect spiritually" with them. There was a feeling among the group that, for the most part, the existing black fraternities reflected a bygone era—"an era when whites placed limits on black opportunities and blacks placed limits on their own aspirations."[108]

As America entered the 1960s, a new societal ethos emerged. Unlike in the previous decade, there was no longer a blind adherence to the status quo. In fact, a questioning and challenging of traditional authority had become the tenor of the times. There was no greater example of this than the civil rights movement, which was in full swing at the time of Iota's founding. The founders believed that their organization could be used to address these and other social issues impacting the black community in Baltimore.[109] Change was the order of the day, and the twelve originators of Iota Phi Theta "were determined to create an organization that would be receptive to a changing world."[110] With this in mind, the nucleus of the organization grew from an informal social club, originally called "I Felta Thigh," to one that ultimately evolved into a full-fledged fraternity.[111] According to Ron Jones, a 1966 initiate of Iota, one of the organization's first acts was to participate in a march protesting segregationist practices at a local shopping center.[112]

"Building a Tradition, Not Resting upon One," was chosen as the motto for the organization. The members selected charcoal brown and gilded gold as the fraternity's official colors. The centaur, a mythological beast with the head of a man and the body of a stallion, would be the identifying symbol of the organization, and a yellow rose was designated as the fraternity's official flower.[113] The guiding principles of the organization are written in the fraternity's history book, *The Centaur Rising:* "Iota Phi Theta was founded with the primary goal in mind of contributing in the largest measure possible to the preeminence of equal opportunity and social justice and the well being of humankind . . . to inspire and foster the highest ideals of brotherhood and considerate behavior; to develop the higher qualities of the mind and to nurture respect for learning; economic success, and to operate without offense or injury to anyone."[114]

Although there were other fraternities on the Morgan State campus, the men who created Iota Phi Theta felt that there was not "one fraternity in existence that reflected their reality."[115] "Ignore them and they'll go away" seemed to sum up the established fraternities' reaction to Iota's existence.[116] The founders of the organization were unique, in that many of them were three to five years older than their college peers and lived off campus. Some were military veterans, and others were married with small children. In addition to at-

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tending school full-time, several worked at full-time jobs. Overall, the collective life experiences of the fraternity's originators were in sharp contrast to those of "typical" undergraduate students of the day.[117]

Growth of the organization was problematic in its early years, due to two factors. First, because most of the fraternity's members were older and lived off campus, the recruitment of new members was difficult. Second, the fraternity was not a member of the NPHC, established in 1930 as the organizing body of the existing eight BGLOs. Lack of the NPHC "credential" made many observers wary of the organization's legitimacy. Although the members of Iota Phi Theta made their mark on campus through their academic and extracurricular achievements, the group still remained a small and local one.[118] It was during those early years that the fraternity found a trusted ally and friend in Audrey Brooks, a staff member of the college. Her "behind the scenes" assistance and guidance proved invaluable to the men and "prevented the fledgling organization from being victimized by those who would have seen Iota fail."[119] Brooks had a personal interest in the success of the organization as well; her son was a member of the fraternity's first group of initiates in 1964.[120]

The initiation of a group of enthusiastic, campus-based men in 1967 (known as the Pied Pipers) signaled the beginning of the fraternity's rise on the Morgan State campus and beyond. Within a year, the fervent efforts of the neophyte members resulted in the establishment of additional chapters at Hampton Institute, Delaware State College, Norfolk State College, and Jersey City State College. On November 1, 1968, the fraternity was incorporated under the laws of the state of Maryland. By 1974, the organization had grown from a regional organization to one that was more national in scope, with the formation of a chapter at Southern Illinois University.[121]

Shortly after celebrating its thirty-third anniversary, Iota Phi Theta was finally granted membership in the NPHC on November 12, 1996. To commemorate the event, a formal induction ceremony was held in February 1997. This momentous and historic occasion was attended by members of Iota Phi Theta, as well as representatives from the eight other BGLOs. The "Great Eight" had now become the "Divine Nine."[122]

## National Pan-Hellenic Council

The NPHC, the organizing body of the nine BGLOs, was established at Howard University in May 1930. Charter members of the organization included the

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Kappa Alpha Psi and Omega Psi Phi fraternities and the Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, and Zeta Phi Beta sororities. Alpha Phi Alpha and Phi Beta Sigma joined the group in 1931, and Sigma Gamma Rho joined in 1937. The NPHC was incorporated under a charter granted in 1937 in the state of Illinois. The initial purpose of the council was "to foster unanimity of thought and action as far as possible in the conduct of Greek Letter Collegiate Fraternities and Sororities, and consider questions and problems of mutual interest to its member organizations."[123] Today, the mission statement of the NPHC declares:

> The National Pan-Hellenic Council shall serve as the official coordinating agent of the nine (9) constituent member Greek letter fraternities and sororities in the furtherance of their program unity on college and university campuses and within the several communities wherein graduate and/or alumni(ae) chapters of said fraternities and sororities are located. In furtherance of this mission, the National Pan-Hellenic Council shall:
>
> 1. Assist in establishing and facilitating local councils on campuses and within communities wherein chapters of these fraternities and sororities are located.
> 2. Serve as the communication link between/among the constituent fraternities and sororities, especially in matters such as scheduling workshops and national meetings.
> 3. Conduct periodic workshops or training sessions with the officers of the local councils in order to ensure clearer understanding of common operational procedures.
> 4. Conduct regional conferences on a biennial basis as a means of developing operational efficiency and program effectiveness.
> 5. Work cooperatively with other enabling groups such as the National Black Leadership Roundtable, the National Coalition of Black Voter Participation, the NAACP, the Urban League, UNCF, among others.
> 6. Perform such other coordinating functions as set forth within the Constitution and Bylaws of the NPHC or as determined by the Executive Board.[124]

Tracing the historical development of the NPHC reveals that the steps leading up to its founding actually began eight years earlier, in 1922. It was then that a similar attempt was made on the Howard campus to start an organization that would serve Negro fraternities and sororities. However, "little came of that venture."[125]

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Six years later, in December 1928, another meeting was held in Indianapolis with representatives from Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, and Sigma Gamma Rho. It was at this assemblage that the organization that would ultimately become the NPHC had its "spiritual birth."[126] Realizing they had limited authority to finalize plans for a collective representative body, the delegates were unable to take the necessary action. However, they formed a temporary organization, electing Matthew Bullock of Omega Psi Phi as temporary chairman and Lois Jones of Delta Sigma Theta as temporary secretary. The group then appointed a Committee on Procedure, composed of one representative from each organization, whose task was to devise a plan for a permanent organization. A subsequent meeting was scheduled for the summer of 1929.[127]

## Conclusion

Nearly a century has passed since the eldest organization of the nine that now constitute the National Pan-Hellenic Council was founded. Throughout its history, the BGLO movement has provided its members with the opportunity to experience the camaraderie of brotherhood and sisterhood, service to others, and social and personal development. And unlike the Greek experience of their white counterparts, this affiliation has continued for many BGLO members through active participation in graduate chapters. Men and women from within this membership represent a virtual "Who's Who" in black America and have distinguished themselves in almost every field of professional endeavor.[128]

Although the organizations have made significant contributions through their commitment to community service and philanthropy, they continue to have their critics. In particular, they have suffered immeasurable damage as a result of hazing practices by some undergraduate members that have resulted in several deaths.[129] What lies ahead for the Divine Nine? Kimbrough cites the often frustrating "to pledge or not to pledge" conundrum, the redefinition of the role of advisers to BGLOs, and the issue of "minority members" as being among the challenges these groups will face in the future.[130] Whatever else lies ahead, though, one thing is certain: collegians will continue to seek membership in these organizations for the opportunity to partake of the enduring legacy and vision set forth by their founders.

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## Notes

1. For more information on Phi Beta Kappa, see Oscar Voorhees, *The History of Phi Beta Kappa* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1945).

2. Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 144–50.

3. Jack L. Anson and Robert F. Marchesani Jr., eds., *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities* (Indianapolis: Baird's Manual Foundation, 1991), I-12, IV-4.

4. Rudolph, *American College and University,* 144–50.

5. Harcourt A. Tynes, "Collegians, Patricians and Fratres," *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal* 14 (April 1928): 126.

6. Charles H. Wesley, *The History of Alpha Phi Alpha: A Development in College Life* (Chicago: Foundation Publishers, 1981), 15–16.

7. Charles H. Wesley, *Henry Arthur Callis: Life and Legacy* (Baltimore: Foundation Publishers, 1997), 20–21.

8. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha,* 16.

9. Henry Arthur Callis, "Notes on the Founding of Alpha," *Sphinx* 38 (February 1952): 8–11; Wesley, *Henry Arthur Callis,* 23–26; Herman Mason, *The Talented Tenth: The Founders and Presidents of Alpha* (Winter Park, FL: Four G Publishers, 1999), 6.

10. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha,* 20–21; Wesley, *Henry Arthur Callis,* 23.

11. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha,* 21.

12. Wesley, *Henry Arthur Callis,* 22, 30.

13. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha,* 29–31. According to Wesley, there was lengthy discussion over which individuals would be considered actual founders, or "Jewels," of the fraternity. He states that the founders "can be only those persons who initiated the fraternal idea and remained steadfast to their design even in the days of conflict and struggle" (28). C. C. Poindexter's leadership and involvement were significant in the early stages of the organization, but he was never a proponent of the fraternal idea. The same can be said of George Tompkins (29). Morgan T. Phillips had been suggested for consideration, but he was not in school during the period of organization (31). So contentious was the issue that Eugene Kinckle Jones, the fraternity's first initiate, was not afforded the title "Jewel" until decades later. Based on a review of "letters and exhibits," the personal recollections of living Jewels (Callis, Kelly, and Murray), and a thorough examination of Jones's contributions to the development of the fraternity, he was finally granted that honor at the fraternity's 1952 convention in Cleveland, Ohio (331–34).

14. Walter Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 29–32. Kimbrough states that Gamma Phi fraternity "should rightfully be considered the first collegiate, Black fraternal organization" (147). Founded at Wilberforce University in March 1905, Gamma Phi played a prominent role in campus life and

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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had a consistent presence at the institution for at least thirty years. While in existence, the fraternity also established at least three additional chapters (30).

15. Mason, *The Talented Tenth,* 100–1.

16. Callis, "Notes on the Founding of Alpha," 33.

17. Ibid., 11.

18. Marjorie Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha: In the Eye of the Beholder* (Washington, DC: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 1979), vii.

19. Ibid.; Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha,* 43.

20. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha: In the Eye of the Beholder,* vii–viii; "History of Alpha Chapter—Howard University," *Alpha Kappa Alpha Ivy Leaf* 1, no. 1 (1921): 4.

21. Marjorie H. Parker, *Past Is Prologue: The History of Alpha Kappa Alpha 1908–1999* (Washington, DC: Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, 1999), 3.

22. "Address Delivered by Soror Lucy D. Slowe at the Annual A.K.A. Boulé Banquet," *Alpha Kappa Alpha Ivy Leaf* (December 1933): 19; Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha: In the Eye of the Beholder,* 13. Although January 15 is recognized as the founding date of the organization, earlier references from the *Ivy Leaf* (vol.1, no. 1, and vol. 4, no. 1) give it as January 16.

23. Marjorie H. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha through the Years 1908–1988* (Chicago: Mobium Press, 1990), 10.

24. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha through the Years,* 10; "History of Alpha Chapter—Howard University," 4.

25. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha through the Years,* 10–11.

26. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha: In the Eye of the Beholder,* 29.

27. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha through the Years,* 35–36.

28. Parker, *Alpha Kappa Alpha: In the Eye of the Beholder,* 30.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. "Musings at a Founders' Day Banquet," *Alpha Kappa Alpha Ivy Leaf* (March 1934): 7.

32. William L. Crump, *The Story of Kappa Alpha Psi* (Philadelphia: Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, 1991), 3.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., xxi.

36. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha,* 41, 43.

37. Crump, *Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* xxi, 3; Jimmie Coggs, "Howard University Called Haven of Our Greek-Letter Societies," *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal* 25 (April 1939): 144; Crump, *Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* xxi.

38. Crump, *Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* 3.

39. Ibid., 3–5.

40. *Kappa Alpha Psi Journal* 22 (November 1935): 25.

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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41. Ibid.

42. Crump, *Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* 15, 21.

43. Ibid., 24, 28.

44. Numa P. Adams, "The Place of the Fraternity in Negro College Life," *Howard University Record* 13 (June 1919): 17–18.

45. Robert L. Gill, *A History of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity* (Washington, DC: Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, 1963), 1–2.

46. *Nikh* 1 (1914), Howard University Archives (hereafter HUA).

47. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro in the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 383.

48. Herman Dreer, *The History of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity* (Washington, DC: Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, 1940), 10–12. Dr. Ernest E. Just, noted for his work in cytology and embryology, was the recipient of the first Spingarn Medal for Outstanding Achievement (1915) awarded by the NAACP. He was elected the first honorary member of Omega Psi Phi on February 28, 1912. Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1988), 49.

49. Gill, *History of Omega Psi Phi,* 1; Dreer, *History of Omega Psi Phi,* 12.

50. Walter H. Mazyck, "Omega's Infancy," *Oracle* (October 1929): 7.

51. Ibid.; Gill, *History of Omega Psi Phi,* 2–3.

52. Mazyck, "Omega's Infancy," 7; Gill, *History of Omega Psi Phi,* 3.

53. Dreer, *History of Omega Psi Phi,* 25.

54. Mary E. Vroman, *Shaped to Its Purpose: Delta Sigma Theta—The First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1965), 11; Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 48.

55. Vroman, *Shaped to Its Purpose,* 11.

56. Elizabeth Murphy Moss, *Be Strong! The Life of Vashti Turley Murphy* (Baltimore: n.p., 1980), 11.

57. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 49.

58. Ibid., 48.

59. Ibid., 50.

60. Ibid., 48, 50; Pauline Hill and Sherrilyn Jordan, *Too Young to Be Old: The Story of Bertha Pitts Campbell, a Founder of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated* (Seattle: Peanut Butter Publishing, 1981), 21.

61. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 49. Young was dating Omega founder Edgar Love; Brown was engaged to Omega founder Frank Coleman, whom she married shortly after graduation. Coleman's sister Grace was initiated into Delta Sigma Theta in 1913, and she served as its president in 1914.

62. Edna J. Norris, "A Brief History of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority," *Delta Journal* (April 1943): 8; Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 51.

63. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 51; Hill and Jordan, *Too Young to Be Old,* 21.

64. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 52; "The Delta Legacy: Delta Sigma Theta Is

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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Born," in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., 43rd National Convention Souvenir Program, 1996.

65. Moss, *Be Strong,* 8.

66. Robert Ewell Greene, *Delta Memories: A Historical Summary* (Washington, DC: n.p., 1981), 1.

67. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood,* 56–60.

68. W. Sherman Savage and L. D. Reddick, *Our Cause Speeds On: An Informal History of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity* (Atlanta: Fuller Press, 1957), 13–14.

69. Ibid., 14.

70. "Our Founding Fathers," *Crescent* (Fall 1964): 4.

71. Savage and Reddick, *Our Cause Speeds On,* 14–15.

72. Ibid., 23; Leonard F. Morse, "As I Remember Them," *Crescent* (1977): 9.

73. Savage and Reddick, *Our Cause Speeds On,* 15; A. Langston Taylor, "The First Four Years," *Crescent* (Fall 1977): 12. Although Phi Beta Sigma sources identify the approving body as the Board of Deans, sources cited earlier in regard to Omega Psi Phi's founding refer to the University Council. It appears that either responsibility for the approval of student organizations changed hands or the organization's name changed.

74. Savage and Reddick, *Our Cause Speeds On,* 15.

75. Ibid.

76. "A Brief History of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity," in Official Silver Anniversary Souvenir Program, Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Conclave, 1939, 4, HUA.

77. *Mirror* (1915): 81, HUA.

78. "Our Founding Fathers," 4; *Nikh* (1915): 81, HUA.

79. Savage and Reddick, *Our Cause Speeds On,* 21.

80. Ibid., 23; Taylor, "The First Four Years," 13.

81. Charles Robert Taylor, "In the Beginning," *Crescent* (Fall 1977): 11.

82. "History of the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority," *Crescent* (April 1929): 57.

83. Taylor, "In the Beginning," 11.

84. Lullelia W. Harrison, *Torchbearers of a Legacy: A History of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. 1920–1997* (Washington, DC: Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, 1998), 2, xviii.

85. Ibid., 12.

86. Ibid., 13. During this period, there was a noticeable caste system operating within the Howard student body, and many attributed its development and persistence to the presence of fraternities and sororities. One student described this system, saying, "the difference may be as small as a fifty cent piece, a second suit, a new dress, or slight variations of hair and complexion" ("Snobs," *Hilltop,* November 14, 1924, 2). One fraternal organization allegedly conducted a "paper bag test," whereby a prospective pledge was denied admission if his skin color was darker than a brown paper bag (Vernon C. Thompson, "Fraternities, Sororities Draw Renewed Interest from Howard Students," *Washington Post,* November 16, 1978, 1). In a 1929 article in the *Hilltop*

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(April 29, 1929, 1), Edward Taylor posed the question, "Are fraternities and sororities the cause of color segregation at Howard?" Noting the tendency for students to divide themselves into three very identifiable groups, "1) light skinned, 2) brown skinned, and 3) dark skinned," he accused the Greek-letter organizations of "seeking the brotherhood and womanhood of those persons of light complexion or who are light-brown skinned." This article was reprinted in several white newspapers with nationwide circulations, bringing considerable attention and embarrassment to the institution. Taylor's observations depicted Howard as a school "gone color crazy, where the students under mulatto domination and leadership separate into light, brown, and dark groups" (Chancellor Williams, "The Color Question at Howard, or Much Ado about Nothing," *Hilltop*, May 5, 1929, 6). Many in the Howard community refuted the prevalence of these practices, and some attributed them to only a small minority; overall, however, the student body at large seemed to acknowledge their existence (André McKenzie, "Fraters: Black Greek-Letter Fraternities at Four Historically Black Colleges, 1920–1960" [PhD diss., Teachers College, Columbia University, 1986], 50–52).

87. Harrison, *Torchbearers of a Legacy*, 3.

88. Ibid., 13.

89. Taylor, "In the Beginning," 11.

90. "History of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority," 57; Taylor, "In the Beginning," 11.

91. Harrison, *Torchbearers of a Legacy*, 2–3.

92. Arizona Cleaver Stemons, "Zeta's 35 Years," *Archon* (December 1955): 4; Harrison, *Torchbearers of a Legacy*, 3, 10.

93. Savage and Reddick, *Our Cause Speeds On*, 34.

94. Harrison, *Torchbearers of a Legacy*, 3, 7–12.

95. Deborah Cannon Partridge, "35 Years of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority—Its Past, Present, Future," *Archon* (December 1955): 9.

96. "History of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority," 57; Harrison, *Torchbearers of a Legacy*, 4.

97. Pearl Schwartz White, *Behind These Doors— A Legacy: The History of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority* (Chicago: Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, 1974), 190.

98. Ibid., 1, 213.

99. Ibid., 1, 154, 190.

100. Ibid., 2–4, 212, 268.

101. Delight Hinton, "Expansion of Our Sorority," *Aurora* 1, no. 1 (1928): 9.

102. White, *Behind These Doors*, 8, 209, 280.

103. Ibid., 194.

104. John D. Slade, *The Centaur Rising: Iota Phi Theta Fraternity, Inc.* (Washington, DC: Nations Capital Publishers, 1999).

105. Lawrence C. Ross, *The Divine Nine* (New York: Kensington Publishing, 2000), 134.

106. Slade, *Centaur Rising*, 25.

107. Roberto Rodriguez, "Pledging Relevance," *Black Issues in Higher Education*, November 30, 1995, 33.

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108. Slade, *Centaur Rising,* 28.

109. Dwayne Dixon, telephone conversation with the author, May 27, 2004. Dixon, a 1980 initiate of Iota Phi Theta, currently serves as the organization's director of marketing.

110. Slade, *Centaur Rising,* 30.

111. Ibid.; Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101,* 101.

112. Ron Jones, telephone conversation with the author, May 27, 2004. Jones is a 1966 initiate of Iota and serves as recording secretary for the organization's board of directors; he was previously the fraternity's director of graduate affairs.

113. http://www.iotaphitheta.org/history.

114. Slade, *Centaur Rising,* 31.

115. Ibid., 26.

116. Dixon conversation.

117. http://www.iotaphitheta.org/history.

118. Ross, *The Divine Nine,* 135.

119. http://www.iotaphitheta.org/history.

120. Ibid.

121. Jones conversation; Ross, *The Divine Nine,* 135; http://www.iotaphitheta.org/history.

122. http://www.iotaphitheta.org/history.

123. "The National Pan-Hellenic Council," *Oracle* (December 1939): 108.

124. Ross, *The Divine Nine,* 423–24.

125. Crump, *Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* 95.

126. Ira Dea Reid, "The Pan-Hellenic," *Oracle* (February 1929): 5.

127. Crump, *Story of Kappa Alpha Psi,* 95; Reid, "The Pan-Hellenic," 5.

128. Ross, *The Divine Nine,* 42–44, 69–72, 98–100, 130–31, 160, 212, 235–42, 273, 306–7.

129. Cheo Hodari Coker, "A Pledge to Die," *Savoy* 3, no. 4 (May 2003): 90–97; "Fatal Beating Fuels Concern about Hazing on Campuses," *New York Times,* February 20, 1994, 18; Robert Gearty, "Teen from Bronx Dies in Hazing," *New York Daily News,* October 20, 1989, 7.

130. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101,* 148, 163, 169.

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# 7

# Lobbying Congress for Civil Rights

## The American Council on Human Rights, 1948–1963

*Robert L. Harris Jr.*

From December 27 to 31, 1952, six of the eight major black fraternities and sororities in the United States held an unprecedented joint meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, with 4,000 delegates in attendance. Members of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho, and Zeta Phi Beta sororities and Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Alpha Psi fraternities scheduled their national conventions to take place at the same time. The purpose of the joint meeting was to (1) stimulate interest among their members for active support of the American Council on Human Rights (ACHR) programs, (2) demonstrate to the world the willingness and ability of the organizations to fight effectively for equality and justice for all, (3) further the principle of cooperation among the six organizations, and (4) provide an opportunity for mutual acquaintance and socialization among the members of the organizations.[1]

Henry Arthur Callis, one of the founders of Alpha Phi Alpha, addressed the combined meeting on the "Significance of Joint Action by Fraternities and Sororities." He remarked that during the past forty years, the most significant result of their mutual efforts had been the U.S. government's agreement in 1917 to appoint and train black men as commissioned officers in the U.S. Army. At that time, many members of the black fraternities and sororities had thought that there would be greater cooperation among the Greek-letter organizations. A generation passed, however, before establishment of the ACHR. Callis reminded the group that "we are representatives of a quarter million trained men and women who carry still the welfare of 15 million people on our shoulders, whether we liked it or not." He concluded that the organizations had grown out of "faith in a people who had survived centuries of inhumanity," that "they were conceived in the pain of the distressful plight of a people [who] were struggling for dignity, self-respect, and just rewards, both spiritual and material, for [their] labor and service."[2]



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## Origin and Organization of the American Council on Human Rights

The ACHR had its origin in the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority's National Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs, formed in 1936 to monitor legislation, lobby Congress and the executive branch for civil rights, and keep the public informed about both domestic and foreign affairs. The council let the country know that African Americans "were actively and intelligently concerned about national and international questions important to all Negroes."[3] Efforts in 1940 to combine resources in a legislative project were interrupted by World War II. After the war, in 1946, the heads of the Greek-letter organizations met in Detroit to discuss greater cooperation. By January 1948, after subsequent meetings, six of the eight organizations had agreed to move forward and to make an annual financial commitment of $2,500 each to form the American Council on Human Rights. Its goal was to mobilize the influence and resources of its members in the struggle for equal justice and opportunity for all U.S. citizens. The ACHR would concentrate primarily on encouraging Congress and the federal government to pass legislation and formulate administrative policies to achieve its goals. An inaugural dinner was held in October 1948 to launch the organization, which now had a constitution and bylaws, a well-defined program, a national office, and a full-time staff of three.[4] Elmer W. Henderson, a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, became executive director, and Patricia Roberts, a member of Delta Sigma Theta, became assistant director.

Henderson was a graduate of Morgan College and had a master's degree in sociology from the University of Chicago. In 1942, while working as a field representative for the Fair Employment Practices Committee, he took a train from Washington, D.C., to Birmingham, Alabama. En route, he went to the dining car for a meal. The railroad required that black diners sit at the two tables nearest the kitchen, separated by a curtain from white patrons. When Henderson entered the dining car, whites occupied those tables, and the curtain had been opened. Although there were other tables available, Henderson had not been seated by the time meals stopped being served at 9:00 P.M. Henderson decided to file suit against the Southern Railway Company and contacted Belford V. Lawson, a graduate of the University of Michigan and Howard University Law School. In 1938, Lawson had won a Supreme Court decision that prohibited federal courts from enjoining picketing against employment discrimination.[5]

Lawson was general counsel of Alpha Phi Alpha, and he recommended that the fraternity support Henderson's case to challenge dining car segrega-

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tion. Seven years earlier, the fraternity had financed Donald Murray's lawsuit for admission to the University of Maryland Law School, which had been argued by Alpha members Charles H. Houston and Thurgood Marshall. Although Murray was not a member of the fraternity, the organization paid for his books and tuition until he graduated.[6] Lawson initially filed a complaint for Henderson on October 10, 1942, with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). A series of rulings and appeals wended their way through the ICC and the federal district court in Baltimore before reaching the U.S. Supreme Court in March 1949. The Supreme Court ruled eight to zero in Henderson's favor on June 5, 1950, finding that Southern Railway's segregated dining practices violated the nondiscrimination clause of ICC regulations.[7]

Patricia Roberts (Harris) was a summa cum laude graduate of Howard University and had earned a law degree at George Washington University. She later became ambassador to Luxembourg, dean of the Howard University Law School, and both secretary of housing and urban development and secretary of health, education, and welfare during the Carter administration.[8]

The ACHR was organized eleven months before the United Nations adopted its Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948, so it is difficult to draw a direct connection between the two. The UN Charter, however, as adopted on June 26, 1945, contained seven specific references to human rights and might have influenced the name of the ACHR.[9]

To stimulate interest in the ACHR among undergraduate students, the organization sponsored a slogan contest on fifty-four college campuses across the country. A faculty judge at each campus selected the three best entries and forwarded them to the national judges: John Hope Franklin, professor of history at Howard University and member of Alpha Phi Alpha; Dorothy Height, secretary for interracial education of the YWCA National Board and president of Delta Sigma Theta; and Nancy B. Woolridge, professor of English at Hampton Institute and member of Zeta Phi Beta. Miss Willie Lee Martin of Benedict College in Columbia, South Carolina, won first prize with her entry "Human Rights—Democracy's Birthright."[10]

The ACHR established local councils in Baltimore, Charleston (West Virginia), Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, and Winston-Salem. By 1952, there were twenty-six local councils in eighteen states and the District of Columbia. The local councils were established to bring together member organizations in support of the national program, to organize letter-writing campaigns and put other forms of pressure on congressmen and senators, and to provide a vehicle for the political education of their members. During its first

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six months of operation, the ACHR published a bulletin on important legislation before Congress and a brochure listing important civil rights bills and suggestions on how to secure their passage. The organization supported an education bill to set a minimum expenditure of $55 per elementary and secondary school student throughout the country. It fought against an immigration bill that would limit immigrants from the Caribbean, especially Jamaica and Trinidad, and favored the extension of Social Security benefits to domestic and farm workers. The ACHR sought legislation to bar discrimination in employment, protect the right to vote, ban racial segregation in interstate travel, make lynching a federal crime, abolish the poll tax, and eliminate racial discrimination and segregation in the nation's capital.[11]

The ACHR, with its annual awards dinners, was the first organization to break the segregation policies of Washington hotels. Each year, the ACHR recognized members of Congress and others who had rendered meritorious service to advance human rights. The inaugural awards dinner in 1948 honored Norma E. Boyd, founder and director of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority's National Non-Partisan Council on Public Affairs; Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas of California for her work to achieve the dignity and benefits of citizenship for all U.S citizens and for her efforts to end discrimination against African American members of the armed forces; and Senator Wayne L. Morse of Oregon for his commitment to racial equality, especially his opposition to legislation that would have perpetuated segregation in public education. In 1949, the ACHR recognized Secretary of the Interior Julius A. King for his stand against racial discrimination in the use of Washington swimming pools and other recreational facilities. The following year, Judge J. Waites Waring of Charleston, South Carolina, was honored for outlawing the white primary in that state. Phi Alpha Psi fraternity of Amherst College received recognition for initiating an African American member and facing expulsion by its national organization. The year 1950 was a momentous one in weakening the facade of "separate but equal" through the Supreme Court decisions in the *Henderson, Sweatt,* and *McLaurin* cases. In 1951, the ACHR honored the solicitor general of the United States, Philip B. Perlman, who had filed friend-of-the-court briefs in those cases, as well as Thurgood Marshall and Belford V. Lawson for their roles in bringing the cases before the Court.[12]

At the 1952 joint meeting of ACHR member organizations, the group honored President Harry S. Truman for his contributions to human rights and equality. Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman accepted on Truman's behalf. Chapman reaffirmed that racial segregation in the nation's capital would

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soon end. Sir Zafrulla Khan, Pakistan's minister of foreign affairs, addressed the assembly on the work of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He indicated that despite progress, the vast majority of the world's population still did not enjoy fundamental freedoms. The struggle for human rights and national aspirations was one of the greatest challenges of the times. The joint meeting called on President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower to make sure that qualified Negroes received responsible policy-making positions in his administration and to see that all departments and bureaus of the government conducted their programs on the basis of strict equality in employment and participation. The delegates asked him to end racial segregation in the District of Columbia and in the armed forces. The conference also passed resolutions that urged the Senate to wipe out the filibuster rule that stifled so much civil rights legislation and implored Congress to enact enforceable fair employment, antilynching, anti–poll tax, and other antisegregation legislation.[13]

In early 1952, the ACHR learned that the U.S. Army had given permission for bandsmen of the Thirty-first Infantry from Alabama and Mississippi to wear the Confederate uniform, and it received reports from Korea about the Confederate flag being flown alongside the U.S. flag on the battlefield and at military installations. The organization called a meeting to address those concerns and petitioned the U.S. government to remove the Confederate flag from military installations and to prohibit anyone engaged in government business from wearing the Confederate uniform. To counteract the growing popularity of the Confederate flag, the ACHR distributed thousands of automobile and window stickers with the slogan "Our Flag is the American Flag."[14]

Elmer W. Henderson, the ACHR's executive director, toured France, England, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland during April and May 1952 to determine the effect of racial discrimination on the nation's standing and prestige abroad; the effectiveness of the State Department's informational program in counteracting anti-U.S. propaganda; the use of Point Four funds in non-self-governing areas, particularly in Africa; and conditions among African American troops stationed in Europe. Henderson reported that race relations had become a critical issue in international relations and that U.S. foreign policy was in great danger of failing in its major objectives unless the State Department and government officials became more aggressive in informing Congress and the public about the dangers of refusing to address major problems at home.[15]

During its early years, local councils of the ACHR expressed two major concerns: whether the ACHR duplicated the work of other organizations, such

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as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League, and whether the ACHR was on the attorney general's subversive group list. The latter concern grew out of the fear of being labeled "Red" during the cold war hysteria of the 1950s. The ACHR did not believe that its work overlapped with that of the National Urban League, because of its limited activities in the nongovernmental arena, but it acknowledged the similarity of its work and that of the NAACP. However, the NAACP had a broad-based membership, whereas the ACHR represented a more specialized constituency of about 200,000 college graduates and college students, including a large number of educators. Education was the ACHR's chief means to bring about change in civil rights and human relations, and it sought to involve members of black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) in social and political action. BGLOs had a reputation for being insular and remote from the masses of African Americans. At the 1952 joint meeting in Cleveland, Mordecai Johnson, the president of Howard University, remarked that he was "overjoyed and grateful that six Greek-letter organizations have come together under the banner of human rights. I was afraid that our sororities and fraternities would follow the usual pattern, become the intellectual elite, unconcerned about the welfare of the people, and by that sign become morally dead."[16]

The ACHR worked closely with the NAACP and was among the twenty-five organizations that Walter White, NAACP executive secretary, called together in 1949 to form the Joint Committee on Civil Rights. This was a precursor to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, which was organized in 1950 and established a formal lobbying office in Washington, D.C., in 1963. Because the various organizations were lobbying Congress for different pieces of legislation, confusion was created and was often used as an excuse for not taking any action. White reasoned that with greater coordination and a unified strategy, legislative victories would be easier to achieve. Twenty-one organizations, including the six BGLOs, attended the meeting on February 5, 1949. The ACHR became a member of the Joint Committee on Civil Rights' Legislative Strategy Committee.[17]

Prior to the 1952 national political conventions, the ACHR held a workshop attended by 200 participants at the University of Chicago. The discussions focused on civil rights, housing, business and finance, health, employment, and education. The ACHR developed a nine-point platform on civil rights to be presented to each political party. The platform called for outlawing the filibuster in the Senate; passing a fair employment practices bill with enforcement powers; abolishing segregation in all areas under federal authority,

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including interstate transportation; enacting antilynching legislation; adopting an anti–poll tax law; strengthening the civil rights section in the Department of Justice; creating a permanent Civil Rights Commission; providing home rule for the District of Columbia; and supporting statehood for Alaska and Hawaii.[18] Henderson appeared before the Resolutions Committee of the Republican National Convention in Chicago on July 1 and urged adoption of the nine-point program. He made a similar appearance before the Platform Committee of the Democratic National Convention held later that month, also in Chicago.

The ACHR determined that because the basic issues of civil rights were going to be decided in Congress, its members should pay close attention to the elections, especially for the House and Senate. The ACHR recommended a timetable for local councils on voter education and get-out-the-vote campaigns, observance of United Nations Day on October 24 and election day on November 4, meetings with newly elected senators and representatives, celebrations of Human Rights Day on December 10, and a community self-survey of civil rights for January of the new year.[19] The goal was 100 percent turnout of eligible black voters.

## Evaluating the Council's Aims, Methods, Finances, and Program

At its board of directors meeting on October 19, 1951, the ACHR discussed funding of the organization's programs and addressed concerns that the ACHR duplicated the work of other organizations. John Hope Franklin, a member of the board of directors representing Alpha Phi Alpha, observed that "individual remarks and misgivings concerning specific attainments of ACHR made it imperative that we re-examine, and if necessary re-evaluate and reformulate, our policy on Human Rights."[20] The board of directors agreed that the ACHR should clarify its approach and program in clear and unmistakable terms to avoid duplication with other organizations.[21] Two years later, in May 1953, the ACHR contracted with Dr. Howard H. Long, dean of Central State College in Ohio and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, to undertake an "objective appraisal of the organization's work" in light of its purpose, which was "the elimination of racial discrimination and segregation in employment, armed services, international affairs, accommodations and transportation, and other areas of Civil Rights."[22] Serving with him on the evaluation team were Enos S. Andrews of Kappa Alpha Psi, Vivian E. Cook of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Patricia Roberts of

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Delta Sigma Theta, James N. Saunders of Alpha Phi Alpha, Josephine C. Smith of Zeta Phi Beta, and Lorraine A. Williams of Sigma Gamma Rho. Dr. Paul Cooke, associate professor of English at Miners Teachers College in Washington, D.C., and a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, served as researcher for the project.[23]

Cooke suggested that the study examine the record of the ACHR since its organization in 1948; review the organization's aim, program, method, and means of operation; and survey outside opinions about the group. The methodology for the study would be an analysis of reports, minutes, correspondence, releases, and other printed material, interviews, and questionnaires. The evaluation would seek to identify the philosophy supporting the founding and continuation of the ACHR, its aims, methods of operation, financing, and broad program and specific projects. The analysis of goals, accomplishments, methods, and means of operation would lead to specific recommendations for the ACHR, especially regarding aims, structure, program, and aspects of operation.[24] The result of the evaluation was a 123-page published report with three parts: a background chapter; a review of the ACHR's programs in fair employment, civil rights, armed forces, international affairs, housing, education and public relations, local councils, and operation; and a summary and evaluation.[25]

The evaluation revealed that the ACHR relied primarily on letter writing, testimony before Congress, meetings with key government officials, and, in a few instances, lawsuits to accomplish its objectives. It did not picket, boycott, strike, or sit in. Its purpose was the "extension of civil rights without regard to race, color, or religion."[26] The ACHR sought specifically to end racial discrimination in the District of Columbia, because it was the nation's capital. Moreover, the organization fought to improve employment opportunities for African Americans in the federal government, especially in the executive branch, and in policy-making positions. One of the ACHR's most significant accomplishments was related to Henderson's successful lawsuit against Southern Railway. Despite the Supreme Court's 1950 decision requiring that black passengers receive service similar to white diners, Southern Railway later ordered that the seating of diners should be by race. The ACHR pursued the issue with the ICC, which forced the railroad to rescind its order in November 1953. The ACHR also threatened to sue the Phillips Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri, when it refused accommodations, despite an acknowledged reservation, to A. Maceo Smith, president of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and a member of the ACHR board of directors. The case was settled out of court when the hotel agreed to pay $300 plus court costs.[27]

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Although interest in forming local ACHR councils remained high, the number of active local councils never exceeded thirty-five; there were only twenty at the time of the evaluation, even though there was a potential for a hundred. There was also the problem of organizing federated groups that were accustomed to being autonomous, as well as a lack of information about the ACHR from its member organizations and from the council itself.[28]

With regard to concerns about program duplication, the evaluation team reported that although there was some overlap with the NAACP, the two organizations complemented and reinforced each other in pursuing the goal of freedom and equality. Both were needed in a battle for racial equality that required repeated blows from a variety of sources against the edifice of racial segregation. Moreover, desegregation did not automatically mean integration into American society. The evaluation report further observed that BGLOs had suffered from criticism in the press and elsewhere for their excessive social activities, which might have influenced them to engage in serious social reform programs. Immediately after World War II, there was a growing sense of social change throughout the world, based on the principles of freedom espoused by the Allied powers.[29] College-educated Negroes, according to the evaluation report, were perhaps the most restive of African Americans because they sought to do something meaningful for themselves and for their fellow citizens to gain first-class citizenship.[30]

The evaluation report recommended without reservation the continued operation of the ACHR and called on its board of directors to "reaffirm their faith both in the ACHR purpose and the Council's ability to move steadily toward the goal" of ending racial discrimination. The report suggested that the ACHR expand its membership by inviting college fraternities and sororities, without regard for race or religion, to join in the cause for civil rights. Membership in the ACHR would also help Greek-letter organizations in general overcome the stigma of being perceived as frivolous, snobbish, exclusive, and irrelevant groups. Moreover, a broader membership would provide greater financial resources for a larger and more effective operation. An increase in the budget, better pay for staff, and more assistance to the local councils were priorities identified by the evaluation. The report endorsed the ACHR's social action program, with its emphasis on housing, employment, armed services, public accommodations, and a cloture amendment. It recommended that a "preparation for integrated living" project become part of the social action program and noted, "a dominant curse of segregation is that the segregated almost always are victims of deviant standards in habits of living, in sense of

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responsibility, and in self-esteem. There must be persistent search for the antidote to fawning and acceptance of inviting inferior status when dealing with the majority group." This idea of "preparation for integration," although not explicitly expressed in those terms, became the basis for "freedom schools" in the South during the civil rights campaigns of the 1960s. The report also urged the ACHR to expand its work in educating the public about human rights and its goals. The evaluation team recommended that the ACHR's quarterly publication, *Congress and Equality,* appear more frequently, and it proposed that the board of directors, which met twice a year in Washington, D.C., hold some of its meetings in cities with local councils, to strengthen that connection. The ACHR's pressure initially on Congress and later on the executive branch of government was appropriate, according to the evaluation, considering the problem of getting civil rights legislation through the Senate because of the filibuster. The council's methods of agitation through testimony, letter writing, and meetings with government officials were effective, given that it did not have the staff or resources to organize pickets, boycotts, or other direct action campaigns.[31]

## Reorganization and Activism

A year after the evaluation report, Elmer W. Henderson resigned as executive director of the ACHR, although he remained on the board of directors as a representative from Kappa Alpha Psi. Henderson assumed the post of associate counsel to the House Subcommittee on Executive and Legislative Reorganization. At the March 1955 board of directors meeting, it was decided to have a part-time director, part-time consultant, full-time administrative assistant, and part-time clerk while the personnel committee searched for a full-time director. Aubrey E. Robinson Jr., a member of Alpha Phi Alpha and general counsel for the ACHR, became the part-time director, and Paul Cooke, who had served as researcher for the evaluation report, became a part-time consultant to work with the local councils. At the October 1955 board of directors meeting, Dorothy Height, a member of Delta Sigma Theta, suggested that the ACHR look into why Omega Psi Phi fraternity had never joined the organization and why Phi Beta Sigma had joined but pulled out in 1952. In fact, the ACHR would soon become an organization of African American sororities, as Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity left the group in 1956 and Kappa Alpha Psi withdrew a year later.[32] With the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision prohibiting racial segregation, the fraternities concentrated their

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efforts on civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Those male-dominated organizations were headed by members of the fraternities, which might explain why the sororities continued their support of the ACHR. Phi Delta Kappa sorority, founded in 1923 as a professional sisterhood among black teachers, joined the original four sorority members to continue the work of the ACHR. With the withdrawal of all the fraternities by 1957, the ACHR sought to broaden its membership with the addition of other women's groups, such as Chi Eta Phi, the nurses' sorority. Those efforts were unsuccessful, and the organization continued with a membership of five sororities.

Aretha McKinley of New York City, a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha, became director of the organization in 1956. She focused the ACHR's attention on the preparation of civil rights kits for distribution at upcoming BGLO conventions. The ACHR also published a series of eight ready-reference guides on civil rights legislation, political action, fair employment, and decent housing. These guides were prepared under the direction of Paul Cooke and appeared before the ACHR became primarily a consortium of African American sororities. The first guide explained the ACHR's program, its goal and target aims, its activities and accomplishments, and its structure and direction. Its stated goal was the complete elimination of segregation, exclusion, and any other form of discrimination based on race, religion, color, or national origin; to achieve this goal, its specific objectives were fair employment through legislation, enforcement of government contract and fair employment provisions by presidential committees, support of state and municipal fair employment legislation and ordinances, and fair representation of African Americans and other minorities in federal appointments. The ACHR supported federal housing legislation that recognized the need for nonsegregated public housing, guaranteed nondiscriminatory treatment in urban renewal programs, banned the use of federal funds for segregated housing, established housing programs to meet the needs of middle-income people, and promoted nondiscriminatory housing under urban redevelopment. The guide also addressed the transition to school integration and called for school boards to issue fair education and employment policies. It stressed safeguards against discrimination and segregation in federal aid to education or construction legislation; encouraged all citizens to register and vote in local, state, and national elections; and urged the end of segregation in public transportation—both intrastate and interstate bus and railroad travel—through congressional legislation and action by the ICC. The

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ACHR also called for elimination of the filibuster in the Senate. The guide supported the passage of antilynching and anti–poll tax bills and the abolition of racial discrimination in immigration and naturalization. Finally, it demanded open access to state and municipal parks as well as federal recreation areas.[33]

The second ready-reference guide listed the committees of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives that handled civil rights bills, as well as the names of the chairpersons and members of each committee. It outlined the civil rights bills before the Eighty-fourth Congress in 1955 and 1956 and the people who had introduced them. The second guide called on local ACHR councils to officially endorse the bills, write to the committee chairpersons about their endorsement, advise their representatives and senators about their support for the legislation, and visit their members of Congress at the Capitol or at home to lobby for passage of the civil rights bills. The proposed legislation would outlaw lynching; end the poll tax in federal elections; ban racial segregation in public transportation; prohibit housing discrimination; withhold federal funding from schools that discriminated on the basis of race, color, religion, ancestry, or national origin; bar employment discrimination; strengthen laws against convict labor, peonage, slavery, and involuntary servitude; establish a commission on civil rights in the executive branch; and create an assistant attorney general and a Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department.[34] In 1957, Congress passed its first civil rights bill since Reconstruction, enacting legislation to establish a Civil Rights Commission and a Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department.[35]

The third ready-reference guide addressed school integration. It reprinted excerpts from the Supreme Court's May 17, 1954, ruling that struck down laws requiring racial segregation in public education and its decree on May 31, 1955, that required "all deliberate speed" in ending segregated school systems. The ACHR urged its members to ensure that the Supreme Court's rulings were implemented in affected areas and to monitor the race of students and teachers assigned to schools in the North and West through gerrymandering or the manipulation of school district boundaries. ACHR members were encouraged to ascertain that buildings were adequate for educational programs, that curricula were equitable and accessible to all students, and that black teachers received opportunities for administrative positions.[36]

The fourth ready-reference guide was a handbook for local councils. It reiterated the ACHR's fundamental goal and the role of local councils in striving for the national target aims and in attacking local civil rights problems. The pamphlet reviewed some of the local councils' efforts, offered suggestions

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for civil rights action and educational programs, recommended ways to form local councils, and provided a sample constitution for local ACHR units. The publication suggested that the local councils might do more in the areas of housing segregation and employment discrimination, and it quoted Judge William Hastie, a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity, that "segregated housing does more than any other single feature of American urban living to make members of the segregated minority and particularly Negroes as the largest such minority, strangers in what is nominally their home community . . . a great part of any comprehensive program for the elimination of racism in American life during the twentieth century must be concerned upon the breaking down of urban and suburban residential segregation." The reference guide urged local councils to maintain contact with the national ACHR office for information and mutual support, and each local council was encouraged to establish a social action committee and an education committee. The ACHR was dedicated to the active promotion of social change to end racial segregation, discrimination, and inequality, and it believed that educating its members, the public, and elected officials would secure that change.[37]

In ready-reference guide number five, the ACHR provided twenty-five questions and answers about itself. In addition to discussing the group's organization, scope, aims, and relevance after the 1954 Supreme Court decision against racial segregation, the guide addressed the perennial question of the extent to which the ACHR's work duplicated that of the NAACP. It pointed out that the ACHR had a unique constituency of college-educated members, while the NAACP had a more broad-based membership. The two groups brought different pressures to bear in the fight for civil rights. The Greek-letter organizations were in a strong position to influence legislative and administrative action through lobbying campaigns. That work differed from the purpose of the Panhellenic councils made up of local black fraternities and sororities, which were concerned primarily with improving relations among undergraduate organizations on campus and with college administrations and generally did not engage in civil rights activities.

Ready-reference number six, a political action handbook, was a reprint from the Friends Committee on National Legislation.[38] It provided basic guidelines for active citizenship by explaining democracy and individual responsibility, the major committees of Congress, how bills become law, and how citizens could be most effective in influencing the passage of legislation. The Voluntary Home Mortgage Credit Program was the focus of ready-reference number seven. It provided suggestions for how local councils could test the program

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to help minority home buyers get mortgages in cities where they had been denied loans.[39] Paul Cooke reported to the ACHR's board of directors that ready-reference number eight would deal with registration and voting. In 1955–1956, the ACHR distributed approximately 48,000 printed materials. That information was made available to the national BGLO conventions as well as to ACHR member organizations.

Around the same time, the board of directors asked the House Un-American Activities Committee to investigate the Citizens Councils that had been formed in many areas of the South to oppose desegregation.[40] The ACHR considered the Citizens Councils' activities to be against the law.

At its October 1956 meeting, the ACHR board of directors announced that its inquiries, along with those of other organizations, to the president of the American Psychological Association had led to a report by eighteen leading psychologists that there was no proven difference between the mental potentials of whites and Negroes. The Committee on Program recommended that the ACHR, in preparation for its integrated living project, use local councils, youth agencies, school organizations, churches, and the like to instill in black youth an awareness of the responsibilities accompanying full citizenship. The focus of the project should be on courtesy, cultural standards, social amenities, and so forth.[41] Members of the ACHR were primarily middle-class African Americans with bourgeois values. They were part of W. E. B. DuBois's "talented tenth" who felt an obligation to set standards of respectability for black America, especially in interaction with the broader society after the fall of segregation.

In 1960, the ACHR established a Student Emergency Fund to assist college students who suffered financial difficulties because of their involvement in peaceful protest demonstrations against segregation. The ACHR raised $7,500 for this purpose and provided grants to the four students at North Carolina A&T University in Greensboro who sparked the student sit-in movement in February 1960. Ezell A. Blair Jr., one of the four, wrote to the ACHR that "the finances will aid me considerably in the continuance of my quest for knowledge. May God's blessings continue to be yours for the rewarding task you are doing to rid our nation of discrimination based on race, religion or creed."[42] Among other students who received grants were John Lewis, a student at American Baptist Seminary in Nashville and a participant in the 1961 Freedom Rides, and Lonnie King, a student at Morehouse College who was active in local demonstrations to desegregate department stores and lunch counters. The ACHR also contributed $1,000 to the Atlanta Women's Steering Committee, which

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provided meals for students on the picket lines, wrote letters to stores guilty of segregation, and contacted local and state officials to end discriminatory practices in Atlanta.[43]

The ACHR held a series of workshops from 1956 to 1960 for college students to discuss equal opportunities in voting, employment, housing, and education and to develop leadership skills. The theme of the 1960 workshop, which attracted 500 participants from colleges throughout the country, was "A Political Primer for the 1960s: Education—Understanding—Action." In the 1956 presidential election, only 3.5 million African Americans out of 9.25 million eligible voters went to the polls. The black turnout was 20 percent less than the percentage of eligible white voters who cast ballots. The ACHR launched a national crusade to register and mobilize African Americans to vote in the 1960 presidential election. In addition to direct action campaigns, the ACHR believed that registration, voting, and litigation were the most effective weapons available to achieve racial equality. The council also pushed for the United States' acceptance and implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Throughout its existence, the ACHR had maintained a keen interest in the United Nations, gaining observer status with the UN General Assembly and taking part in UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) conferences. The organization protested the State Department's refusal to recommend ratification of the Covenant on Human Rights as part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The ACHR sought independence for the colonized nations of Africa and the Caribbean and an end to apartheid in South Africa. It strongly supported the distribution of UNESCO's pamphlet "Race," which had been withdrawn from circulation because of State Department objections and was later reissued with some revisions.[44]

In March 1961, the ACHR, now an organization of five sororities (four college based and one professional) representing 100,000 members, sent a position paper to newly inaugurated President John F. Kennedy, who had appeared before the council's Political Workshop and Leaders Conference at Howard University in October 1960.[45] The position paper addressed four major areas: education, employment, equal opportunity, and housing. The ACHR endorsed the president's call for legislation to address school construction, teachers' salaries, and federal scholarships but objected to the possibility that federal funds might be used for segregated schools. The ACHR recommended that the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare provide in-service training for professionals involved in school desegregation and disseminate information on successful desegregation plans. President Kennedy had promised

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that full employment would be a major objective of his administration, and the ACHR urged the federal government to end discrimination in its own agencies and to enforce equal employment opportunity at the district, regional, and state levels in particular. To help attract more African Americans to government positions, especially at the executive and administrative levels, the ACHR offered to assist in the search for talent. The organization pointed out that African American women were one of the nation's most poorly used human resources, although they were eminently qualified by training and experience for policy-making positions. Although the ACHR applauded Kennedy's statements in support of school desegregation and enforcement of the 1954 Supreme Court decision, it criticized his failure to introduce any civil rights legislation. It encouraged the federal government to end segregation in interstate travel, especially in waiting rooms and public facilities, and to remove discrimination in public accommodations and services, which not only violated the rights of American citizens but also embarrassed the nation when representatives from other countries experienced such discrimination. Further, the ACHR asked Kennedy to enforce nondiscrimination in all federal housing programs and to make decent and affordable housing a reality for all Americans.[46] The ACHR also commended Kennedy's appointment of Dr. Robert C. Weaver to head the U.S. Housing and Home Finance Agency, the highest federal position held by an African American.

Although the ACHR had survived from 1957 to 1961 as a black women's organization, it received a severe jolt in 1961 when Delta Sigma Theta sorority withdrew from the council. The Deltas had decided to focus their resources on organizations such as the National Council of Negro Women, whose president, Dorothy Height, had headed the Deltas from 1947 to 1956.[47] During early 1963, the executive board of the ACHR voted to recommend to the board of directors that the organization cease its activities, close its office, and contribute any remaining funds to groups working to achieve the goals for which the ACHR had been organized. Recognizing that its members had changed their approaches to the organization's core issues, the remaining member sororities accepted the recommendation. With progress in civil rights legislation and enforcement, the organizations turned from lobbying activities to social action programs. The board of directors planned to hold a gala reception in Washington, D.C., on Friday, November 22, 1963, at which the funds would be disbursed. The assassination of President Kennedy earlier that day led to the cancellation of most activities in Washington and across the nation, but the ACHR decided to continue with the reception as a tribute to the slain presi-

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dent, whom many considered a martyr. Opening remarks by Dr. Deborah P. Wolf, program chair and grand president of Zeta Phi Beta sorority, highlighted President Kennedy's identification with the civil rights movement, and she recalled his appearance as a candidate before the ACHR workshop at Howard University. Gladys Burton of Phi Delta Kappa made a $1,000 contribution to the Prince Edward County Free School Association; Dr. Lorraine Williams, former grand basileus of Sigma Gamma Rho, presented Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee with $1,000; and Marjorie Parker, former supreme basileus of Alpha Kappa Alpha, gave the Reverend Walter E. Fauntroy $500 for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.[48] The sororities' choice of organizations reflected the interests of the respective groups.

## Legacy

Although each of the BGLOs had social action programs, the ACHR brought together the combined strength of six black fraternities and sororities, about 200,000 college-educated women and men, to press for civil rights. Through its national programs, especially its ready-reference guides, and its local councils, the ACHR helped energize the civil rights movement, inspiring many black college students to work for freedom, justice, and equality. Although it is difficult to measure its direct accomplishments, the ACHR kept pressure for civil rights on the executive and legislative branches of government until the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights established a formal lobbying office in Washington, D.C., in 1963.

## Notes

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6. Charles H. Wesley, *The History of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity: A Development in Negro College Life* (Washington, D.C.: Foundation Publishers, 1942), 321–22.

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12. *The American Council on Human Rights: An Evaluation* (Washington, D.C.: ACHR, 1954).

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19. Ibid.

20. ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meeting, October 19, 1951, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Papers.

21. Ibid.

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24. Paul Cooke, "Survey and Evaluation of the American Council on Human Rights," n.d., in ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meetings, 1951–54, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Papers.

25. *ACHR: An Evaluation.*

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., 103, 107; ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meeting, October 20, 1951, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Papers.

28. *ACHR: An Evaluation,* 109.

29. The major Allied powers during World War II were Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States; the Axis powers were Germany, Italy, and Japan.

30. *ACHR: An Evaluation,* 111–15.

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31. Ibid., 111–15, 117, 120–23.

32. ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meetings, March 15, 1952, March 16–19, 1955, October 14, 1955, and September 14, 1957, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Papers. Omega Psi Phi fraternity probably never joined the ACHR because of concerns about duplicating the work of the NAACP (see ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meeting, October 14, 1955). When Phi Beta Sigma fraternity left the ACHR, its national president, Dr. Felix J. Brown, explained, "The move was brought by a shift of emphasis on the fraternity's oldest major program, that of Bigger and Better Business, now in its 27th year" (*Chicago Defender,* January19, 1952, 2). Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, which contributed about $500 a year to the NAACP before 1956, began giving $2,500 that year, the amount of its ACHR appropriation (Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Board of Directors' Reports, 1953–1956, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Papers, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University).

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35. ACHR Ready Reference No. 2, ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meetings, 1955–1961, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Papers.

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38. The Friends Committee on National Legislation is a lobby founded in 1943 by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to advocate for social and economic justice, peace, and good government.

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40. The House Un-American Activities Committee was established by the House of Representatives in 1938 to investigate disloyalty and subversive organizations. The committee was used primarily to expose communists and communist sympathizers in the United States.

41. Annual Report of the Consultant, March 16, 1956, and ACHR Minutes of Board of Directors' Meeting, October 19–20, 1956, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Papers.

42. Highlights from ACHR, February 1961, ibid.; *Chicago Defender,* February 18–21, 1961, 15.

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# Part II

## Black Greek-Letter Organization Culture



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# 8

## Sister Acts

### Resistance in Sweetheart and Little Sister Programs

*Mindy Stombler and Irene Padavic*

Fraternity "sweetheart" and "little sister" programs comprise large groups of women who affiliate with—but do not join—a given fraternity. In fact, these organizations are usually not sanctioned by national umbrella associations. Sweethearts and little sisters are responsible for tasks such as serving as hostesses at fraternity parties, fulfilling brothers' community service obligations, acting as cheerleaders for intramural sports, and fund-raising. Such organizations associated with African American fraternities are considered "non-Greek" and have names that reflect the individual fraternities, such as Alpha Angels, Kappa Sweethearts, Que Pearls, Sigma Doves, and Iota Sweethearts. For purposes of this chapter, we use the term *sweethearts* to denote black women's auxiliary organizations and *little sisters* for their white counterparts, even though a few white organizations refer to their members as sweethearts.

Sweetheart and little sister groups gained in popularity in the 1960s and 1970s, at a time when fraternities were experiencing a decline in membership. By the end of the 1990s, almost all of the national organizations that govern fraternities and sororities had recommended that these auxiliary groups be disbanded. Although many were dissolved, some groups continue to thrive.

Researchers typically paint a bleak picture of male dominance and female subordination in these programs. Institutional oversight is minimal; university officials, national fraternities, local alumni and advisers, and women students have little supervisory authority. Fraternity men can thus exploit these young women for their physical labor (e.g., post-party cleanup), for their emotional labor (e.g., cheerleading), and for their sexuality (e.g., modeling bikinis for full-color fraternity-rush advertisements).

There are many aspects of sweetheart and little sister organizations worthy of study, such as membership, pledging, hazing, and intra- and intergroup relationships. In the process of conducting interviews on the reasons why



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women join these groups, the costs and benefits of participation, relationships among women, and the selection process, we became intrigued by fraternity men's treatment of these women and the women's responses. This chapter focuses on the theme of resistance: how do women in these organizations react to the treatment they receive in fraternities? History offers many examples of how people challenge their positions in social institutions. Opposition does not have to be formal, public, or organized to qualify as resistance.[1] We believe that for an act to qualify as resistance, however, the actor must intend the act as a protest against an oppressive system. Thus, only those acts that sweethearts or little sisters explicitly identify as protest are considered resistance.

## Methodology

This chapter is based on research conducted over a five-year period in the early 1990s at public universities in the Southeast. The first author conducted interviews with forty women (twenty-one black, nineteen white) of traditional college age who had currently or recently participated in sweetheart or little sister organizations affiliated with eight different fraternity chapters. Most of the respondents were recommended by interfraternity councils, individual fraternities, or other sweethearts or little sisters; in some cases, we specifically asked interviewees for referrals to women whose experiences were different from their own. Interviews averaged an hour an a half and took place in settings chosen by the respondents, including restaurants, student apartments, empty classrooms, fraternity houses, and university offices. Seven interviewees participated in a focus group.

The interviewer was white and close in age to the women interviewed. Although her race might have made black women reluctant to speak openly, we do not believe that this was the case, for two reasons. First, both groups of women frankly discussed both positive and negative (sometimes painful) experiences; we had not expected such candor in light of fraternity members' typical defensiveness about a system that they perceive to be (and often is) under attack. Second, we had very few refusals; black women eagerly agreed to be interviewed, perhaps because we emphasized the need to document experiences that had long been ignored.

Interviews with several other individuals gave us a broader view: an interfraternity council president who had led a campus drive to disband little sister organizations, two little sister program coordinators (fraternity men appointed

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by the fraternity to work closely with little sister programs), a fraternity president, the head of a Greek affairs task force that had recommended disbanding little sister organizations, eight university officials, and a live-in adult supervisor at a fraternity.

The first author also conducted participant observations in one predominantly white fraternity; she attended a little sister rush, several parties and other social events, and an orientation meeting of newly chosen little sisters. Although all the interview and participant observation data are from the Southeast, national data, including national fraternity and sorority newsletters, televised news reports, and talk show transcripts, support our findings. Geographically limited ethnographic research cannot offer definitive answers about these programs, but it suggests how gender inequality is reproduced and resisted on campus.

## Gender Inequality and Peer Group Interactions

Students' everyday peer relations create and maintain gender inequality. Heterosexual peer groups transmit traditional expectations about gender relations through peer associations; both black and white women learn that being attractive to men (as evidenced, for example, by having a boyfriend) is essential to self-worth.[2]

Examining gender relations on a predominantly black and a predominantly white campus in the United States, Dorothy Holland and Margaret Eisenhart found that the differences between black and white women did not overshadow the gender barriers that all the women faced. Their primary finding was race neutral: both black women and white women were "on a sexual auction block," consumed with romance or finding male companionship. Nevertheless, they found that black college women were less single-minded in their focus on men and were less likely to believe that men would support them economically in the future.[3] Similarly, Mary Fuller found that black girls in London high schools sought academic qualifications to assert their capability and intelligence—qualities that school authorities did not expect from them. Moreover, unlike white girls, they did not seek life answers in an ideology of domesticity: "I want a proper job first and some kind of skill so that if I do get married and have children I can go back to it; [I] don't want [to be] just relying on him for money, 'cause I've got to look after myself."[4] Thus, limited research indicates that women of color share a focus on career goals that they

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prioritize over men's approval and support. Research on white students' peer cultures has not found a similar focus to countervail the dominance of heterosexual social life.

In particular, college fraternities socially construct and reaffirm traditional gender relations and thus actively create gender inequality.[5] Our examination of fraternity little sister and sweetheart programs allowed us to explore how peer dynamics are structured, codified, accommodated, and resisted and how these dynamics differ for black and white women. In general, we found that black sweetheart programs offered more liberating structural and cultural elements than did white little sister organizations; this predisposed black women toward a more activist stance than their white counterparts. We discuss these differences and then turn to the types of resistance strategies the two groups tended to use.

## Structural and Cultural Factors Enabling Resistance

At the structural level, several features distinguished black from white programs. Black programs gave veteran members a say in sweetheart selection; used a sweetheart pledge period to enhance women's bonding; created separate, semiautonomous organizational forms for sweetheart programs; and, in most cases, sponsored question-and-answer interest meetings instead of more sexualized rush events. White little sister organizations had none of these structural features. They provided no official role for veteran little sisters; their organizations had no autonomy; and their recruitment process consisted of rush-style events that involved women attending fraternity parties en masse and trying to impress as many men as possible to enhance their chances of being chosen. Nor did white little sisters have a structured "bonding" mechanism, such as a serious pledge period, because it was considered more important for the women to become acquainted with the fraternity brothers than with the other little sisters.

At the cultural level, different ideologies help explain disparate resistance strategies. Both black and white women described an organizational culture in which fraternity men viewed them as partial or inferior members or even nonmembers of the fraternity. (National and local fraternity officials described little sisters as "half-members" and "quasi-members.") Rarely did women question their position. They outwardly accepted the fraternity as the men's property and domain; their purpose was to provide support for the brothers. However, ideological distinctions between the white and black groups fostered

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different propensities to critique the brothers' behavior. Later, we show how, within the structure of female subordination, black women were able to draw on the empowering ideology of "getting ahead" to mobilize for opposition more effectively than their white counterparts, who relied on the ideology of "getting a man" and took a more accommodationist stance. We now turn to specific discussions of the structural and ideological features that informed the selection process, women's motivations for joining sweetheart and little sister programs, and women's notions of sisterhood.

## DIFFERENCES IN SELECTION: PRETTY GIRLS VERSUS STRONG WOMEN

White and black organizations had very different notions about the desirable characteristics of little sisters or sweethearts. Recruitment and selection practices yielded members with different propensities to resist exploitation, which partially explains the different types of resistance that the black and white women tended to adopt. At white fraternities, the main qualities that the men sought in potential little sisters were beauty and sociability. In contrast, men at black fraternities—along with veteran sweethearts, who actively participated in recruitment in most fraternities—sought women who had strong characters and were willing to work for the fraternity.

Describing the qualities men looked for in recruits, a little sister reported, "First of all they look at your face, then they look at your body, and then they say, 'Hi.'" Another said that requirements included "personality, maybe, [but] it's minuscule. . . . [What matters are] your body and your whole outlook on the guys. . . . We didn't have to do anything but look good." Another gave more credit to personality, which she believed gave her the edge over another would-be little sister: "I'm usually really upbeat and outgoing and really easygoing. I like to go up to a brother and just talk to him. [Women that the brothers reject are] shy people when you first meet them."

Sweethearts rarely mentioned beauty or sociability as elements in selection. Instead, recruiters emphasized their desire for "strong" women, an attribute ferreted out with questions such as this one: "I'm going to give you three categories: woman, XYZ sweetheart, and black woman. What order would you put them in and why?" Or this one: "[They asked me,] 'Who do you think is the epitome of the black woman and why?' I said that I felt like it was a close race between my mother and Oprah Winfrey. . . . You want to give the impression that you're sure of yourself."

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According to our respondents, brothers and veteran sweethearts looked for women who "remained collected" during their responses. But poise and self-confidence were not the only selection criteria, as one veteran sweetheart pointed out: "We are looking for someone who is headstrong, who knows that there is a time to play and a time to work. We want people who are not selfish, because in order to do community service you can't be selfish. . . . We are really looking for strong black women, to tell you the truth, because a chain is only as strong as its weakest link and we don't want any weak links." Little sisters, in contrast, were more likely to be punished than rewarded for being headstrong, such as when a fraternity forced its little sister group to close its bank account because the president had been "too bossy."

The selection event was much more emotionally charged for white women than for black women, highlighting the importance of women's relationships with men. Black fraternities—which accepted the vast majority of rushees—simply notified the women by mailing them letters of acceptance. The proportion of women accepted for membership in the white organizations was much smaller, fostering their sense of being among the chosen few. Moreover, white fraternity men publicly acknowledged a woman's selection by taking her for a limousine ride, serenading her in public, or regaling her with flowers. One woman described the process: "They come in and they sing and put you on their lap and lean on one knee. They sit you down, give you a rose and sing a [fraternity] love song." Another said: "It was seen as a big honor. It feels good that so many guys have picked you. When they came and got me, I was so light-headed that I almost fell over."

Thus, the symbolic importance of being chosen by men to be affiliated with a men's group was far more integral to white women's experience than to black women's; this may have led the white women to identify more closely with the fraternity men's interests than with the interests of their own little sister subgroup. More important, white organizations selected women for their beauty and sociability, hardly traits associated with opposition, while black organizations' choice of "headstrong" women promoted the opposite effect.

## MOTIVATIONS FOR JOINING: GETTING A MAN VERSUS GETTING AHEAD

Black and white women shared some motivations for joining: a desire to meet people, to have a social outlet, to be connected to Greek and campus life,

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and to be part of a "family" away from home. Interviews clarified, however, that little sisters joined primarily to meet, befriend, and date men. The white women desired the privileged access to fraternity men that membership brought them, and they saw this access as the main benefit of little sisterhood. For example, when asked why she had joined, one little sister replied: "You get to meet the brothers. . . . They are always calling the little sisters and telling them to go places with them." Another credited the program with finding her a boyfriend: "I date a boy . . . that I probably wouldn't be dating if I wasn't a little sister. You get to meet men."

Sweethearts' focus was quite different. They acknowledged men as potential dates, good friends, or "real brothers" who could protect them or come to their aid if necessary, but many downplayed the importance of meeting men. A large majority claimed that their chief motivation for joining was to have an outlet for community service work, and their substantial time investment in this work corroborated that claim. One said: "When I first went to hear about sweethearts I wasn't interested at all until the brothers really stressed community service. Then I said I would do it."

Beyond the genuine desire to help the black community, many women used participation in community service activities instrumentally, to enhance their attractiveness to sororities: "Sororities want to know what you have done in the community. So I thought that by being a sweetheart I could get my community service."

In a roundabout way, black women used sweetheart participation as an opportunity to get ahead in their careers. The first step, according to many, was acceptance into a sorority.[6] Besides the high status sorority women enjoyed on campus, black women used sororities as networks for future professional advancement and community involvement. Black sororities facilitate career advancement, train black women leaders, and mobilize political and social practices that improve the black community.[7] In fact, members of black sororities tend to be more active after college graduation than before, quite unlike members of white sororities. Our black respondents clearly viewed sororities, not sweetheart programs, as organizations that would "help you get along in whatever you do." One explained: "I see sororities as a way to get ahead. Many women in national and state politics are [in] XYZ [sorority]. That name can help you get connections in the job world. It could help you get hired."

Sweethearts said that their participation enhanced their likelihood of so-

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rority acceptance in three ways: it allowed them to accumulate the hours of community service that sororities consider crucial for admittance; it proved that they could forge bonds with other women; and it provided access to sorority members, who attended fraternity functions. Thus, for most, sweetheart status opened doors to their desired end—sorority membership—and was not an end in itself. "I kind of see it as them [the brothers] introducing us to the sororities. . . . I remember a lot of sorority girls being there [at a fraternity ball]. . . . The sororities look among the sweethearts for potential pledges." Another described being a sweetheart as "something I needed to learn to go on to better things, like a sorority."

Black women's tendency to regard their affiliation with a men's group as a means to achieve affiliation with a women's group underscores their collective realization of the importance of connections with other women, in contrast to white women's focus on men. Sweethearts, situated in a context where men dominate women, worked the existing system on their own behalf. Though it is ironic that black men had any connection at all to women's participation in sorority life, in a further twist, the sweethearts were essentially "using" the fraternity men to achieve their own goals.

## SISTERHOOD

The most marked difference between little sister and sweetheart organizations involves their conceptions of sisterhood. White women reported few, if any, experiences of closeness to other women in the program: "You always knew the guys; the guys stood out. . . . I didn't like the lack of communication between all the girls." Many white women reported competing with one another to get men's attention or, in one instance, to avoid it. In a striking display of unsisterly behavior, during a fraternity event that called for the little sisters to dance provocatively, one woman corralled another sister and "got her to go up there with me so they wouldn't be watching me, they would be watching her!"

In contrast, sweethearts stressed the importance of the bonds among the women in the program. Many aspects of the pledging process facilitated such bonding. In sharp contrast to white women's experiences, at the initial interest meetings at one black fraternity, veteran sweethearts and brothers explained to rushees that they were pledging the auxiliary organization, not the fraternity, and instructed rushees to meet other sweethearts so they could "begin to bond." One veteran sweetheart explained: "You would want to know the sweethearts on a personal level a little bit more than you would the brothers, be-

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cause you're not trying to become a brother. . . . This is our organization and the girls want to come into our organization."

The institution of "line mothers" or "line mommies"—sweetheart presidents in charge of training the incoming pledge class, or "line"—contributed to the black women's esprit de corps. One line mother, who described herself as a "mother hen," became upset when some of her pledges went to breakfast at 4 A.M. with men from a fraternity on another campus: "That upset me. They had never met these guys before. They didn't know these guys or their history or their attitudes. [The men] could have drugged their drinks and we could have never seen them again. I was really angry because I was so scared." Another line mother described the sweethearts' organizational response when a pledge asked for help: "I ran across campus at 6:00 A.M. to [help] her. The next day there were thirty sweethearts in her [dorm] room. . . . If anyone came into that room we were going to kill 'em. We had a bond."

Black fraternities even tested rushees on their ability to bond with other women: "We had to write papers on sisterhood. Now true sisterhood should tell you that we would turn in one paper, [not] twenty-nine. The fraternity brother said, 'You guys are just not learning sisterhood. You all do it again.' He'd say, 'You all bring in food' and we'd bring in twenty-nine items instead of one. See, if there was a true sisterhood, a true unit, we would have all gotten together!" Not surprisingly, given such training, feelings of sisterhood sometimes superseded loyalty to the brothers. One woman pointed out: "We had enough people [sweethearts] to say [to the fraternity brothers], 'You're not going to run over us.' The women stuck up for one another."

In short, sisterhood was the modus vivendi for sweethearts but not for their white counterparts, and it became a resource for them to draw on in altercations with fraternity men. Black women—and men—drew heavily on an ideology of "strong, black womanhood" to formulate their notions of sisterhood and the qualities desirable in a sister.

Why would men select women for these traits when they heighten women's ability to resist? We speculate that powerful women—and many sweethearts were campus leaders—added to the fraternities' prestige, which the men appreciated, just as they would appreciate the prestige attending to a male leader. It is also possible that black men are familiar with and accept strength in women because of the larger history and valorization of black women's labor force participation, family headship, and participation in the civil rights struggle—a movement in which many fraternity chapters were active. Or black fraternities' encouragement of sisterhood ties may have re-

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sulted from earlier institutional battles between brothers and sweethearts that were resolved in the women's favor and whose results are now a normalized part of the institution.

Gerda Lerner described turn-of-the-century black women's clubs whose goal was to "uplift the race" and to dispel negative stereotypes.[8] Updating this mission, some sweetheart organizations defined their organizations as part of the movement to improve black women's social status. For example, one sweetheart president organized a seminar on black women: "I figured that while I'm in office I'm going to make sure that I'm going to do things that go down in history. We organized a seminar called 'Uplifting the Black Woman' and we got a professor to speak. The whole fraternity [brothers and sisters] was there." This type of activity—unheard of in white little sister programs—sends the message that strong women are desired in sweetheart programs because they foster the ideology—begun 100 years ago—that black women are not merely victims of oppression but generators of their own successes.

The structures and ideologies of sweetheart programs emphasized the bonds of sisterhood and mitigated the negative effects of men's treatment; in sharp contrast was the lack of these structures and empowering ideologies in white little sister programs. Structural elements, such as having a voice in recruitment, a pledge period to facilitate female bonding, and some degree of organizational autonomy, lay the necessary foundation for empowerment. Ideologies gave sweethearts a language of collective resistance with which to fight oppressive situations; these women drew on resources within sweetheart programs to make them less oppressive. As we show next, without these structures and ideologies to legitimate collective resistance, white women responded by accommodating or resisting as individuals.

## Strategies of Resistance

Most conflicts between fraternity brothers and little sisters or sweethearts emerged over women's attempts at self-governance and men's resistance to it. Fraternity structure and culture rarely legitimated the rights of these women to speak up, object, express an opinion, or share in decision making, although in some cases, fraternity men granted the women such permission. Most women found ways to accommodate their second-class citizenship. One little sister, irate at the fraternity's practice of using little sisters as "bait"—expecting them to serve drinks, make name tags, and show their "smiling faces" at men's rush

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parties—spoke for many interviewees who felt disgruntled but were unwilling to rock the boat: "Something that made me so mad was when they would tell us to go up to the would-be pledge and make sure that he is having a good time. 'Dance with him or give him a drink or something.' I wouldn't stand up at a little sister meeting and say, 'They're using us!' I didn't feel like I had the power to do that."

Most women complied with the men's demands and viewed their expectations as legitimate; they served the fraternity men in exchange for the men's approval and companionship. One woman echoed this acceptance of male dominance, claiming that auxiliary group members "didn't deserve any rights whatsoever." Others resented the fraternities' demands and their lack of rights but felt powerless to oppose the status quo. By participating in activities requiring subservience, sweetheart and little sister programs generally helped to structure and reproduce gender inequality on campus. Although some women did resist, white women tended to resist as individuals, while black women tended to resist collectively—with more successful results.

## INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

Disaffected white women chose listless compliance and quitting as ways to act on their frustration. For example, at some white fraternities, little sisters participated in an annual fund-raiser called the "Slave Auction." Although no one commented on the racist nature of this event, some women felt that it was degrading because it called for them to dance seductively on stage and then be auctioned off to the highest-bidding brother to perform a week of "slave" services (such as baking brownies, cleaning, or chauffeuring). Brothers at one fraternity bid more money and cheered louder for women who simulated sex on a pole erected in the middle of the stage.

Despite feeling intensely embarrassed or humiliated by this ritual, the little sisters never considered refusing to participate as a group. Instead, they adopted individual strategies of resistance. Several chose not to attend, as did one woman, who said: "I didn't do it. That's one thing I don't approve of. I skipped town." Another said: "Some guys said you had to do it. I was like, 'I don't *have* to do anything!'" Another was willing to dance, but only in a decidedly nonprovocative way. By participating halfheartedly, she was still a good sport but had not soiled her reputation by responding to the brothers' chant, "Hump the pole!" After much agonizing and discussion with her biological brother, another adopted a similar strategy of "safe" rebellion: "I just got up there and

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stood there. I didn't move. . . . I wouldn't try to stop the whole thing . . . and I [wouldn't want to] make everybody mad. But, yeah, I personally wouldn't do it."

Quitting was the other option that individual resisters in predominantly white fraternities employed. One white woman quit upon discovering the brothers' practice of "selecting" a woman—that is, several men would try to have sex with the selected woman by a certain date. She confronted the fraternity president and asked him if what she had heard about a particular woman's "selection" was true. He replied, "Let's just put it this way: one, two and three are done [three brothers had had sex with the woman so far]." She admonished two more brothers for "taking advantage of drunk girls." They said, "What do you want us to do about it?" She replied, "Stop it!" They responded that what they chose to do sexually was their own business, and it wasn't her place to lecture them about it. After warning the woman who had been selected, she quit. "After that situation, I came to a realization that I didn't want to be involved with this. . . . I [even] started doing research on date rape."

Another little sister quit in anger when her fraternity "revamped" the program by discharging all the little sisters and inviting only the "pretty girls" to come back: "I'm disgusted with it. I think they are slime."

Thus, in white fraternities, resistance involved individual acts of halfhearted participation or quitting, akin to James Scott's subterfuge strategies.[9] We found only one instance of a white little sister group that attempted a collective strategy to control the brothers' behavior, and their plan backfired. These little sisters devised "Snake, Slug, Goose" awards, corresponding to individual brothers' exhibition of nice behavior (e.g., helping a little sister with a tax return), rude behavior (e.g., vomiting in a little sister's purse), or unbecoming behavior (e.g., standing up a little sister on a date). The brothers ridiculed those men who received the awards for niceness and celebrated those who received the dishonorable awards, undermining the white little sisters' attempts at solidarity.

## COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

Sweethearts were much more likely to use collective, aboveground strategies to resist fraternity men's exploitation. The most bitter collective protests centered on men's tight control of the organization. In one such protest: "[The sweethearts] had a car wash and the brothers tried to control [the proceeds]. [We] got angry and broke away and had a big cookout with some of the money and split the rest of it. We got kicked out . . . but the brothers really learned

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their lesson after that and treated [the next group] well." New sweethearts were aware of their predecessors' mobilization and said that this realization tightened their sisterly bonds, making them feel like respected members of the fraternity. Thus, this act of resistance led to at least semipermanent change: it emboldened incoming sweethearts and improved the men's treatment of future sweethearts. However, the brothers' final authority was another "lesson," whether or not the women attended to it: the militant sisters were, in fact, ousted.

Fraternities often discouraged women from acting collectively on their own behalf. When several sweethearts wanted to party on their own during a regional fraternity conference, the brothers attempted to escort the women back to the brothers' hotel. When the women protested, the men threatened them: "There was this knock at the door. Our chapter's brothers were outside and they said, 'Tell the rest of the sweethearts that they have to come back with us.' We stayed. The brothers started calling us trouble-makers. They told us that if we did anything else like it, that they would tell all the other chapters of our fraternity in the country that we couldn't be sweethearts. We were like, 'We're not your children [but] that is how you talk to us!'"

She "understood" the terms of being a sweetheart—"if it wasn't for the frat, sweethearts wouldn't exist"—but she felt that disobeying was necessary to prove the point that "we are not beneath them . . . and we're not going to be subservient to anyone—you can forget that—it's not gonna happen."

If enough clashes occurred—if the women could no longer accommodate the terms of the sweetheart bargain—it was not unusual for black organizations, unlike white ones, to create semiautonomous organizations. (Another reason for creating semiautonomous organizations was some national fraternity organizations' unwillingness to allow officially affiliated women's groups.) These groups still operated within the fraternity but coined separate names, assumed more self-governance and autonomy, planned their own social events, and chose their own community service projects. Redefining their relationship to the men's group made the women feel empowered and enhanced their focus on women: "I felt closer to the women. We had our own meetings and our own projects. So the women were the people that I had more constant contact with."

In no instance did reorganizing resolve the fundamental disagreement between the women and men over the fraternity's authority structure, and clashes continually surfaced, particularly about choosing new sweethearts. "[We] pledged our own girls. That was a problem because the guys were also

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allowed to participate . . . and were doing things like groping the pledges!" As this example illustrates, many brothers met sweethearts' resistance with continued social control. In several fraternities where men tried to remove sweethearts' say in selection and pledging, the women argued with them at chapter meetings. According to bell hooks, "talking back" is an "act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination . . . a courageous act—as such, it represents a threat."[10] Often the men did not accommodate such threats. For example: "We had chosen who we wanted on the line and then the brothers wanted to come behind us and re-choose! That caused friction. . . . We got mad because they should have listened to us! We all protested to the brothers."

Sweethearts realized that the men were uncomfortable with even the relatively modest amount of power the women held: "All of the sweethearts stuck together. . . . The brothers stopped us from having meetings by ourselves because we were starting to get too much power [laughs proudly]. I know [another fraternity] canceled their sweethearts right in the middle of the semester because their sweethearts started getting too much power." She continued to reflect on sweethearts' power: "We thought we were getting a lot of power, but in reality we weren't. They stopped us from having regular meetings. We still had meetings [for a while] but they didn't seem worth the problems."

The sweethearts' lack of true membership rights meant that brothers won most altercations. Even when sweethearts formed separate organizations, their impact was more cosmetic than fundamental. Fraternity men still controlled the sweethearts' actions; the men retained the power to abolish these organizations when they saw fit. Clearly, sweethearts did not undo the fraternity's overarching system of patriarchy, but in their own backyards, we found sweetheart resistance that challenged the organizations and actions of their fraternity brothers.

Despite the considerable constraints on their autonomy, women of both races fought back, as either individuals or groups. White women were much more likely to use individual strategies, but on at least one occasion, they too tried collective action. We find it interesting that they felt the need to cast their critique in jocular terms (the "Snake, Slug, Goose" awards), probably because overt rebellion ran a higher risk of annihilation. Sweethearts were far more likely to use collective strategies to protest injustices and seemed less concerned with making the message palatable to the men. Not all their protests were collective, of course; black women, too, objected as individuals. One, for example, stood up to a fraternity man who claimed that he had slept with her: "I con-

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fronted him at a large gathering and I set the record straight loud enough so that those in the fraternity heard." Though individual strategies were not exclusively the province of white women nor collective ones the province of black women, clearly, the tendencies toward particular forms of resistance lay in those directions. Neither form sought to overthrow or even question the fraternity system, only to create more room for autonomous action or dignity.

## Discussion

Fraternity sweetheart and little sister organizations are features of campus culture that help reproduce men's dominance. Yet both black and white women continued to participate in them to further their goals. These goals differed, however, as did the strategies women used to obtain them. Our results show that white women's primary goal was to find men, perhaps to obtain life partners. This goal and the structure and ideology of their organizations—which provided no niche for veteran little sisters and no support for the concepts of sisterhood or womanly strength—inhibited their ability to mobilize for their rights. Nevertheless, they engaged in resistance, characterized by "noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception" instead of overt rebellion.[11]

Although meeting men was a benefit for sweethearts, performing community service and negotiating access to sororities were more important. Because their organizations offered black women more room to maneuver than did white women's—by giving them a say in recruitment and by endorsing sisterhood—they created a space for actions on their own behalf. Their emphasis on sisterhood bonds and the desirability of strength as a quality in women allowed them to collectively protest injustices, with some success.

We draw two larger conclusions from these themes. First, our data show that existing gender relations can change. Because they could draw on liberating elements in their organizations, sweethearts' acts of resistance had greater success than did little sisters', but even white women tried to change some aspects of their organizations to better serve their purposes.

Second, although black and white women both experienced a campus peer culture marked by gender inequities and exploitation, their reactions were remarkably different. We argue that factors both internal and external to the organizations account for these differences. Regarding the internal factors, we have shown that different resistance strategies are partly due to the more liberating ideologies of the black organizations, which endorsed sisterhood and

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recognized the importance of relations with women over those with men. They are also undoubtedly due to the different levels of tenacity with which black and white brothers maintained their claims. Yet this analysis begs the question of why sweetheart programs were structured to allow greater female empowerment and why the goals and strategies of the two groups differed. To understand these factors, we must turn to explanations external to the organization.

The economic oppression of black men forced a measure of economic independence on black women from the time of emancipation.[12] Due in part to the scarcity of good jobs at good wages for men, black culture relied on women's labor force participation and on an extended family system in which women provided material help to one another.[13] These emphases diminished the economic basis of the husband-wife bond that characterizes white culture.[14] As Patricia Collins discovered when she asked young black women about lessons they had learned from their mothers, most answers stressed self-reliance, such as, "want more for yourself than just a man."[15] Elizabeth Higginbotham and Lynn Weber drew a similar conclusion from their quantitative analysis of parents' instructions: "Unlike white women, Black women are typically socialized to view marriage separately from economic security, because it is not expected that marriage will ever remove them from the labor market."[16] These women's notions of "strong, black womanhood" and life success do not include future economic dependence on men. White little sisters can more straightforwardly follow the cultural prescription of "getting a man" as a route to success. This prescription is based on the nineteenth-century social construction of women's economic dependence on men and encourages women to shape their lives on the basis of intimate relationships. From their cultural legacy, they extract "the culture of romance" on which to pin their hopes.[17] Drawing from their culture, black women extricate notions of strength and sisterhood. Neither group is simply victimized by fraternity men; women draw on their resources to further their goals as they see them in a fraternity structure designed to subordinate them.

A different external explanation might be that black and white women enter these organizations with different bases of knowledge about individual and collective resistance. The civil rights movement, for example, galvanized many black women into political action against injustice. Black women of all backgrounds, though rarely recognized as leaders, not only initiated and strategized protests but also mobilized the resources to successfully complete these actions. This participation taught black women about the strategies for and effectiveness of collective action.[18] Sweethearts' collective resistance is also

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reminiscent of church women in the civil rights movement, who vigorously fought the conservatism of the men who controlled the church hierarchies. Thus, although our evidence clearly shows that forces external to the organization were at work, they may have combined with repertoires of resistance and orientations to men and women that were imported from other social venues, organizations, and past experiences.

Many questions remain unanswered about fraternity auxiliary groups. One set of questions concerns why these women choose to participate in auxiliary organizations rather than "going Greek." Do they face financial barriers? Do they find aspects of Greek life unappealing? Does their family history influence their decision? A second set of questions concerns the status and reputations of these groups. We know how women in these organizations view themselves, but we know little about how others view them. Future research could explore the perceptions of fraternity men, sorority sisters, and the general campus population. Research has shown, for example, that white little sisters are quite concerned about their collective sexual reputations,[19] and anecdotal evidence suggests that sweethearts share this concern; this is an issue that needs to be explored. A third area of interest centers on sorority auxiliary groups for men, such as the AKA Cavaliers, the Delta Beau, the Sigma Gamma Rhomeos, and the Zeta Knights. No systematic research exists on these organizations. What is the history and context of their founding? How are they structured? How are members selected? What are men's motivations for joining? What sense of community develops among men in these organizations? How do fraternities, sororities, the campus, and the men themselves view participation in these organizations? How does membership affect their sexual reputations? Answers to these and other questions will greatly expand our knowledge about these men's auxiliary groups and allow comparisons with what we know about sweetheart and little sister groups.

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Gamma Phi Junior Fraternity members at Wilberforce University, 1931. Courtesy of Wilberforce University Archives.

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Prince Hall Masons, 1943. Courtesy of Nanny Jack & Company.

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Cecilia Dunlap Grand Chapter, Order of the Eastern Star, 37th Annual Communication, circa 1930s. From Elizabeth B. Delaney and John W. Delaney Jr. Papers, Center of Excellence for the Study of Kentucky African Americans, Kentucky State University.

Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Epsilon Boulé (Washington, DC), 1912. Front row: Ernest Just (Omega Psi Phi), Charles I. West, Kelly Miller (Alpha Phi Alpha), John F. Francis, Robert Terrell, James A. Cobb. Middle row: A. H. Glenn, E. French Tyson, E. C. Williams, Garnet C. Wilkinson, Milton Francis, Carter G. Woodson (Omega Psi Phi), Arthur S. Gary. Back row: William C. McNeill, G. S. Wormley, Haley Douglas, Alfonso O. Stafford, Arthur M. Curtis, Roscoe C. Bruce. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity members at Yale University, 1914. Courtesy of Nanny Jack & Company.

Alpha Phi Alpha members at Harvard University, circa 1920. Front row: B. T. Johnson, M. Morris, Brown, L. White, F. O. Myers, F. R. Allen, F. Davis, R. Jackson, E. Brown. Middle row: Matney, F. O. White, Platt, C. Harris, E. C. Jordain, Bob Penn-Goodloe, Henderson, C. Johnson, Childs. Back row: Charles H. Wesley, E. Martin, Raymond P. Alexander, W. Smith, Galloway, E. O. Gourdin, unidentified, Brown. From the Collections of the University of Pennsylvania Archives.

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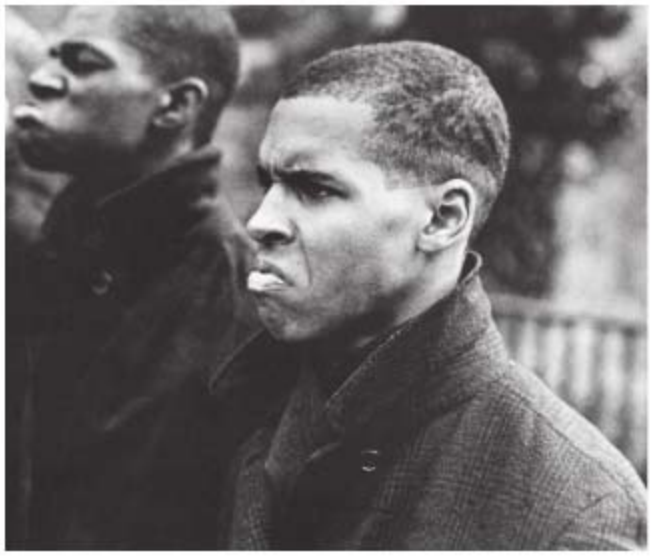

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity pledges at Howard University demonstrate a "grit," 1967. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity members at Howard University, 1934. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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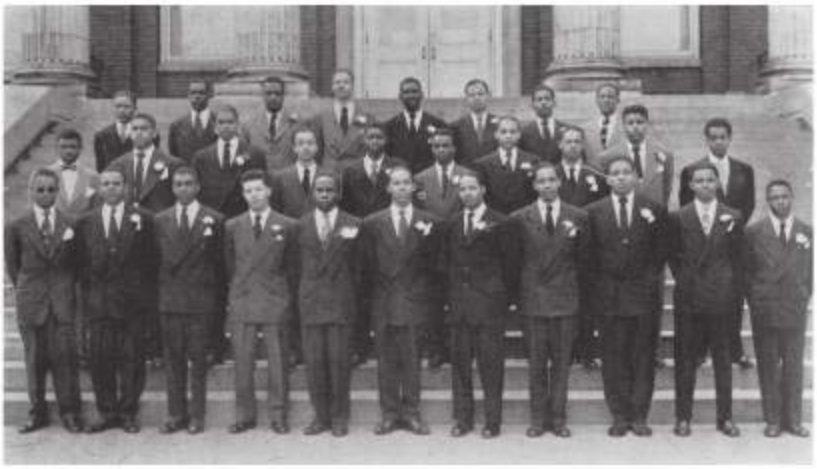

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Scroller Club at Howard University, 1946. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Sweetheart Court at Howard University, 1975. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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Omega Psi Phi Fraternity members at Howard University, 1960. Clockwise from left: Langston Jones, James White, Richard Keels, William Parnell, C. Stanley Jones, Charleston Lee, James Thomas, Marshall Isler, Walter Stroud, William Ellis, Kenneth Marius, James Trimiar, Spencer Boyer, Burnett Harrington, Billy Jones, James Polk, Julian Weaver, Leonard Howie, Thomas Motley, Eddie Brown, Edward Hall. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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Omega Psi Phi Fraternity members at Howard University, 1965. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

An Omega Psi Phi Fraternity pledge at Howard University, 1967. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity members, 1928. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity Crescent Club, 1934. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Iota Phi Theta Fraternity members, 1965. Courtesy of Morganiana Collection, Prints and Photographs Collection, Beulah M. Davis Special Collections Department, Soper Library, Morgan State University.

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Iota Phi Theta Fraternity members, 1967. Courtesy of Beulah M. Davis Special Collections Department, Morgan State University.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Ivy Leaf Club, 1931. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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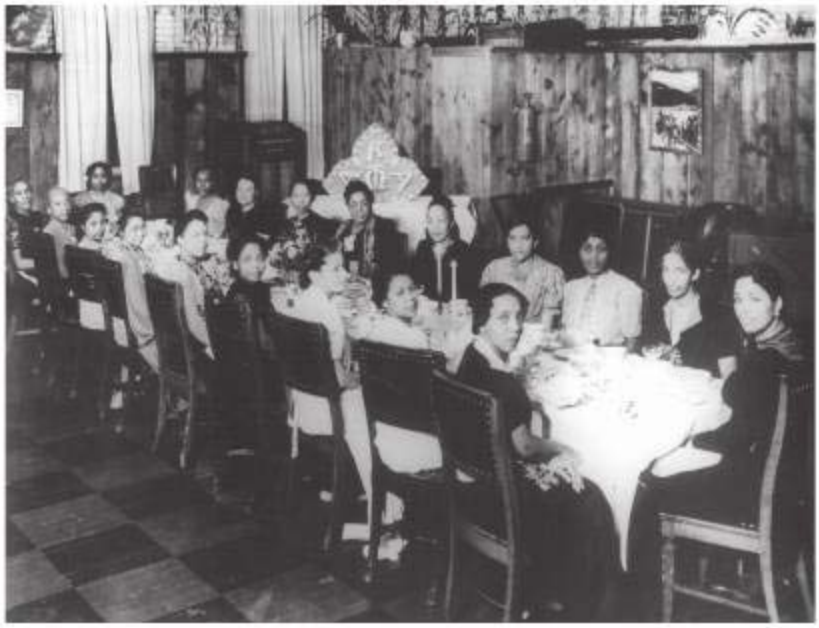

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority members, 1949. Courtesy of University of Kansas Archives.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority members, 1959. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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Delta Sigma Theta Sorority members at the University of Pennsylvania during the 1919–1920 academic year. Sadie Tanner Mossell (BS in education, 1918; AM, 1919; PhD in economics, 1921; LLB, 1927; honorary LLD, 1974) stands at the right in the first row. Her closest friend at Penn, Julia Mae Polk (BS in education, 1920), stands in the center of the first row, and Sadie's future sister-in-law, Virginia Margaret Alexander (BS in education, 1920), stands at the left. Behind them, from left to right, are Esther Louise Butler (BS in education, 1920), Nellie Rathbone Bright (BS in education, 1924), and Pauline Alice Young (BS in education, 1921). From the Collections of the University of Pennsylvania Archives.

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Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Beau Court, 1977. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Pyramid Club, 1931. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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Zeta Phi Beta Sorority members, 1925. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority members, 1928. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority members, 1942. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Phygent Court, 1977. Courtesy of Howard University Archives, Moorland-Spingarn Center.

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American Council on Human Rights National Board of Directors, 1952. Courtesy of Robert Harris Jr., PhD.

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# 9

# The Body Art of Brotherhood

*Sandra Mizumoto Posey*

To break with the ruling hegemony that has a hold on images of the black male body, a revolutionary visual aesthetic must emerge that reappropriates, revises, and reinvents, giving everyone something new to look at.

—bell hooks, *Art on My Mind*

Branding is by no means new to the cultural landscape of the United States. It has been used to mark the ownership of slaves as well as cattle, and this is the iconography to which most people first turn when attempting to understand the practice. Branding in fraternal organizations in general, and in black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) in particular, has a long and living tradition, although most people are probably unaware of it. Thus, its increasing presence in the public eye makes it seem like a new phenomenon, and it is indeed "something new to look at." Although many inside and outside BGLOs condemn it as a reference to the branding of property, to understand it, we must take hooks's words to heart and see it as an aesthetic that "reappropriates, revises, and reinvents" what we think of the "black male body." This reinvention is an ongoing rather than a static process. Like the analysis of any art form, understanding it requires more than an examination of an object or even the culture from which it arose. Rather, one must take into consideration individual motivations, outside interpretations, and changing perspectives. With material forms such as branding, meaning evolves in their conceptualization, in acts of creation, and in their continued use.

Body modification often conjures images of antisocial rebels, disreputable characters, or other unfavorable and sometimes masculinized associations. Yet the type of men who actually modify their bodies and their reasons why span an entire range of possibilities—some falling within traditional notions, and others deviating from them. Thus, this chapter explores brands as part of a



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symbol system in process. In *Studying Organizational Symbolism,* Michael Owen Jones defines *symbol* as a term that "usually connotes something concrete, either an object or a behavior that is reified and treated as a discrete entity. Symbolism refers to both the practice of investing things with meanings and a 'system' of symbols. *Symbolic behavior* directs attention toward people's interaction and communication in the course of which they generate, convey, and infer meanings and significance." Jones also reminds us that although the study of symbols often emphasizes shared interpretations, a more critical point of analysis lies in "multiple and multilayered meanings, even conflicting interpretations of symbolic behavior."[1] Symbols are used to communicate with the self and with others. They are not static. Instead, they are the tools by which we come to understand ourselves and to tell others who we are.

This chapter examines the essential interplay between the negotiation of symbols and their meanings by the public, the organization, and the individual members. At work within these three categories is more than a simple analysis of facts, if there is such a thing. Because many of the historical texts make no mention of branding, "facts" are replaced with a variety of informal narratives. Which narratives the public, the organization, and the individual members accept and which they do not reveal the goals and ideals of those who choose to believe or disbelieve them, and the goals they think the organization possesses or should possess.

## Public Opinion of Body Modification Traditions

To the eyes of outsiders, branding might be associated with hazing or with historical parallels such as the branding of cattle or slaves as a marker of ownership. As part of a larger complex of semipermanent body modification practices such as piercing and tattooing,[2] branding is often viewed by the American public as an abnormal activity engaged in by marginalized individuals and groups. This is far from the case. Some of these practices are gaining in popularity among a wider sphere of people, and other common forms such as plastic surgery or cosmetic tattooing (referred to in the industry as "permanent makeup")[3] are often overlooked or categorized separately. From beauty to belonging, the motivations for altering one's body are as diverse as the people who choose to do it.

Although branding is most commonly associated with BGLO members, many other individuals and groups elect to inscribe indicators of group affili-

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ation on their bodies, sometimes with brands, sometimes with other forms of body modification. Some members of Delta Chi, a historically white fraternity at the University of Arizona, have Greek letters tattooed on their ankles. They see it as "a pride thing" and a matter of tradition.[4] Even President George W. Bush has admitted to taking part in a branding ritual when he was a member of a college fraternity.[5] Many members of the Blue Star tradition of Wicca, a religious sect, choose to be tattooed with a design that grows as they progress through three levels of initiation.[6] Natasha Chen, a graduate student in sociology at UCLA, has her Chinese family name tattooed on her finger, as does her brother.[7] In the early 1990s, an anonymous member of Delta Phi, a predominantly white fraternity at Union College in Schenectady, New York, had his inner left biceps branded with a Maltese cross, the dominant design on the official fraternity badge.[8] As the first member of his pledge class to be branded, he became known as the "brand master" for that year and was responsible for branding other fraternity members who wished to acquire brands. These scars were accomplished by using a wood-handled branding iron, with practice hits first burned on a wooden door at the fraternity house. Some fraternities playfully use the stereotype of branding as hazing during initiation rites: a white-hot branding iron is held in front of the initiate, but the actual "brand" is executed with an identical iron chilled in dry ice.

Opinions about branding vary widely. At one end of the spectrum are those who consider branding to be dangerous. For example, at Rutgers University, Delta Upsilon, a predominantly white fraternity, was subjected to disciplinary sanctions because of its branding practices.[9] Classified as hazing, branding is considered illegal in Nevada and in Plaistow, New Hampshire.[10] A 1993 article in the *Journal of Burn Care and Rehabilitation* calls fraternity branding a "potentially dangerous practice in which college students indulge."[11] At the opposite end of the spectrum are those who consider the practice safe and within the realm of acceptable human behavior. In fact, branding is legal in most states, and in California, one can even attend a state-licensed school to become a brander.[12]

Although society's mixed messages usually serve to underscore the negative public perception of brands and other forms of body modification, the motives of those who actually acquire them span a far wider spectrum. Alene Fernandez recalled that as a member of a secret all-girls club in junior high school in 1936 and 1937, those girls who scratched their initials into their arms with needles acquired extra status within the group. She noted, "There was nothing in the by-laws pertaining to this . . . yet a certain stigma was attached

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to those who didn't do that." Far from being delinquents, Fernandez described the members as "all from well-to-do families. . . . We were all good students and our morals were above reproach."[13]

## Controversy in the Collective

Many BGLO members see branding as an intrinsic part of their group experience, yet the national BGLOs may deny that brands and their display have any connection to the organizations themselves. For example, Omega Psi Phi's official policy manual states:

> The Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. neither approves, condones or has as part of its rules, regulations or ritual the imprinting of its logo, mark or such other symbols on any portion of the human body including but not limited to arms, chest, or otherwise through the method of branding or burning of such logo, mark or symbol onto the human flesh, tatooing [*sic*] or the use of any ink, dye or other substance for the purpose of causing a permanent image on the skin by puncturing it and inserting indelible colors therein or such other procedures likely or calculated to place on the skin temporary or permanent designs which tend and/or are intended to identify a person as a member or potential member of this organization.[14]

Adam McKee, first grand vice basileus of Omega Psi Phi, concurred that branding has no place within the organization: "I'm often amazed at some of the individuals that obtain or desire to obtain a brand, saying this is tradition. I've been in the fraternity many, many years. I'm a student of history. And I often do research from the standpoint of the fraternity tradition and I see nothing in that history that speaks to or even alleges to branding as a procedure for the fraternity."[15]

What makes the act of branding in BGLOs so puzzling is that it is vocally and textually opposed or even denied, yet in the words of the flesh, its presence is "voiced" loudly. That the official policy statement of Omega Psi Phi fraternity adamantly denies that branding is part of the culture of the organization points to the potency of brands as symbolic communication. This issue, which is both a part of fraternities (unofficially) and not a part of them (officially), represents contested values. Who black fraternity men are and are not is nego-

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tiated, debated, celebrated, and defamed in the living, growing, and dying flesh that makes up this artistry of wounds.

Although this chapter focuses on the phenomenon as practiced by the members of Omega Psi Phi, it can provide insights into branding among other BGLOs. In fact, based on the physical evidence at almost any BGLO gathering, it is hard to deny that branding exists, that it is a widespread practice, and that those who participate in it are using the Greek letters of their BGLOs as dominant symbols to inscribe on their flesh. It may be that the official position taken by Omega Psi Phi (and possibly other fraternities) was necessitated by the controversies surrounding fraternities in general and hazing in particular. It has been argued, in contrast to popular opinion, that acquiring a brand is a matter of personal choice and that regulations against the practice were implemented for legal protection:

> When you get into a situation where someone is suing the fraternity, everything you do becomes under strict scrutiny, you know? They're going to try to go after everything and they [claim they] make you brand—they don't make you brand. You know, think about that. You're in the fraternity. How in the world can they make you brand? You burn yourself. They make you do that? That's like one of the dumbest questions people ask me all the time. Did they make you do that. How in the hell are you going to make me?[16]

Despite official condemnation, in the simplest analysis, the Greek-letter brand in all its formations is a signifier, a symbol that a person has become a member of a BGLO. The question to be asked, then, is what inspires the kind of commitment that would cause an individual to burn symbols into his (or her) flesh?

## Individual Identity and the Personal Vocabulary of Symbols

Despite a long history of involvement in social change, black fraternities are not solely geared toward community service. They are, like most fraternities, sororities, and other organizations, also social bodies. Just as an organization can serve multiple purposes and have a different emphasis for each person involved, brands may signify any number of associations to individual members, from personal achievement to social ties to aesthetic inclinations. An

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anonymous black fraternity member expressed a similar sentiment: "It's like the Masons. The Eastern Star. You know, those people go through a lot to have that tag on the back of their car. And you say, 'Why'd you destroy a $30,000 car with a $3.99 tag?' They say, 'Well, I want everybody to know that I am a Mason.' You know, 'Why did you destroy your body with that brand?' Because I want everybody to know. I ain't got to say a word. They know what I stand for. They know what it's about."

For others, brands reinforce social bonds and mark a particular time in their lives. Thus, there is no single, universal answer to the question of why a person would acquire a brand. Inasmuch as the organization fulfills different purposes for different people, so too do the brands. Nor is branding the only means of semipermanent body modification adopted by individuals in BGLOs to express their connection to the group. Many members bear tattoos that use some form of Greek-letter symbolism in the design. Designs often incorporate the BGLO shield, unofficial mascot, or nickname acquired by the BGLO member. Some members bear both brands and tattoos; others have only one form.

Body modification is sought for a number reasons—from relieving boredom to expressing family sentiment—and it is not always simply a signifier of fraternity affiliation. Additionally, some members are open to body modification in multiple forms for multiple reasons, but others restrict themselves to branding only. After the initial brand, however, members often become more open to the idea of acquiring further brands.

Brands can be visible or invisible, but the most common locations for brands—the upper arm and chest—are easily covered. On the cover of *Rebound: The Odyssey of Michael Jordan,* the basketball star poses shirtless with his Omega brand unashamedly revealed.[17] The various formations and placements of brands have multiple interpretations, some of which are shared by many (but by no means all) BGLO members, and some of which are strictly individual and personal. Brands can be simple, consisting of a single Greek letter, or they can be complex. Darryl Butler had six omegas branded in an interlaced pattern that virtually covers his left pectoral muscle. In addition, he bears brands on both calves and biceps, one of which includes the letters of his chapter affiliation. Among Ethan Robinson's eleven brands, he calls the one on his right forearm his "business brand." It is specifically designed to be faint and less visible, he explained: "When I shake hands . . . you get the subliminal Omega."[18] A brand on the wrist of Dwight Perry was termed a "timekeeper" because "it sits on a spot where my watch is supposed to be and anybody asks me what time it is, I know what time it is. I always know what time it is. It's

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Omega time."[19] Placement of the brand on the body can be laden with personal symbolism, such as chest brands referencing a connection with the heart.

Brands on multiple body locations can also signify a certain stature. A brand on the chest, for example, may indicate membership in the "chest club," while a brand on the buttocks may indicate membership in the "ass club." These designations seem to denote a measure of exclusivity, endowing the bearer with a degree of specialness for going further than the norm. Cecil Flournoy III explained:

> You know, most everybody's in an arm club. . . . You know, more people are in an arm or chest club, to tell you the truth. [People] start getting, you know, a little more scarce when you get to the legs and the butt. It's a different club. Butt clubs. And I imagine most of the people that got them on their butts saw somebody at one point or another pull their butt cheek out, show their brand. I like it because it's like, you know, leaves something to be guessed. Like, oh, my God, he has one on his butt! You know?[20]

Some even claim to have penile brands, termed a "legendary hit." Whether these brands actually exist is less important than the stature ascribed to a man who claims to have one. As Jones explains, we often engage in aesthetic behavior because of "the compliments received, the self-image generated and reinforced, the enhancement of utility, the transformation of the quotidian; in a word, the creation of something 'special.'"[21]

In this case, the specialness is characterized by daring or danger, the unusualness of the location, and sexual mystique. For example, one man described getting a penile brand on a "dare," and another mentioned using it as a lure to pique a woman's curiosity. Spike Lee's film *School Daze* also draws on the sexual mystique of brands. In a brief love scene, an actor reveals a (presumably artificial) fraternity brand that his girlfriend proceeds to treat as an erogenous zone. Drawing on research conducted by Henry Drewel, Marcella McCoy points out a parallel function in Yoruba culture, where scars resulting from cutting the skin are perceived as sensual due to their tactile nature.[22]

Emil Hamberlin described a variety of brand formations and the names given to them.[23] The term *Q* or *Que* is often used as a synonym for "a member of Omega Psi Phi," as well as a synonym for the Greek letter omega. Some members explained that *Q* refers to the letter omega because of the similar appearance of the two characters. Hamberlin's improvisational riff on brand

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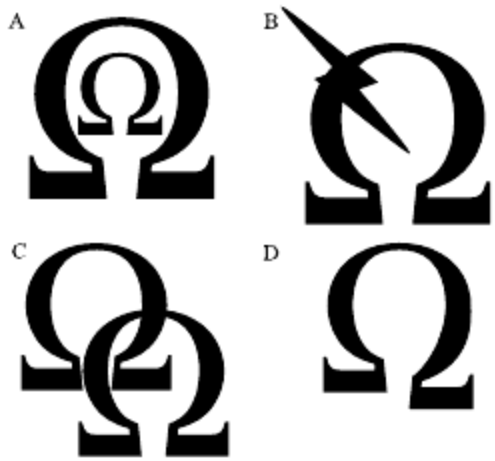


A: "Omega Within"
B: "Sons of Blood and Thunder"
C: "Blood Link" or "Friend over Friend"
D: "Rolling Q" or "Stepping Q"

Figure 9.1. Brand formations and their names.

symbolism might suggest how attributed meanings are created and recreated daily. Some of the designations Hamberlin offered for specific brand formations were corroborated by other members, but with slightly different explanations. For example, some explained that the "Stepping Q" is so called because its uneven extension mimics the posture of legs "stepping," a performance form merging march and dance elements that is characteristic of BGLOs. As an anonymous informant explained, "a Stepping Q was my first one because I was step master and what I did was perform." Hamberlin, however, saw the term encompassing the symbolism of "ascension." John H. Lewis Sr. explained that the same brand is called a "Rolling Q" because the iron is rolled to form the scar.[24]

Hamberlin called a formation with one omega overlaying another "Friend over Friend" or "Blood Link." He stated, "It's like my blood line's running through his blood line." He explained that a brand with a lightning bolt overlaying an omega is called "Sons of Blood and Thunder" because "Omega is

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thunder. It's the lightning bolt. Omega was founded on a rainy day. Stormy day. . . . The blood is friendship. The blood is the link between lightning and thunder. Lightning and thunder are best friends. . . . Lightning needs thunder like gravy needs rice."[25] Darryl Charles, in contrast, said simply that the omega and lightning bolt formation "symbolizes power."[26] Others, however, dismiss the notion that brand formations are linked to multilayered symbolic interpretations.

## Legendary Origins and Secrecy

It is virtually impossible to track the origins of the practice of branding in BGLOs with certainty. The earliest publicly available record of branding in Omega Psi Phi indicates that some form of it was already being practiced as part of a fraternity ritual in 1931, at which time it was officially eliminated. Because branding is an act that does not have official approval or recognition, most BGLO members either do not possess or are not willing to reveal any records documenting its history. BGLOs, like other fraternal organizations, are built on a foundation of hidden information that is available only to members. Although this tends to pose an obstacle to researchers, it can also, in and of itself, be considered data. That there *is* a secretive element to branding is, in some ways, just as important as knowing the actual secret, or perhaps more so. Although she is speaking about art forms on the African continent, the following statement by Mary H. Nooter seems particularly relevant to BGLO brands: "There is a paradox here: although the content of a secret may be guarded and concealed, the secret's existence is often flaunted. To own secret knowledge, and to show that one does, is a form of power. One function of art in Africa, then, is to act as a visual means for broadcasting secrecy—for publicly proclaiming the ownership of privileged information while protecting its contents."[27]

A number of black fraternity members claimed to have knowledge of branding's origins but explained that this topic could not be shared with outsiders. Others did not ascribe such a high level of confidentiality to the information. Some did not want to talk about brands at all, let alone reveal anything about branding's history. While I was interviewing a member in the lobby of the Bonaventure Hotel during the Omega Grand Conclave in 1996, another member instigated a heated argument with the interviewee. That member, who both bore brands and was a brander of others, described the act as "sacred" and was visibly upset that anyone would share information about it with an

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outsider. After I wrote a shorter paper on the topic, Ethan Robinson was confronted by another member about how much he had revealed to me. Thus, each member formulates his own standards of what, and how much, to share. Perhaps in BGLOs like Omega Psi Phi, where the national governing body does not officially recognize branding, there is a lack of consensus about what can and cannot be revealed.

Even when BGLO members do feel free to share information, there is a lack of consensus about where and why the practice began. A number of contrasting tales were offered by various parties, with different levels of personal conviction regarding their historical veracity. What is more important than factual truth, however, is what individual members believe to be the truth. Giving weight to one tale over another can indicate what they deem important or unimportant about themselves, branding, and the organization.

Some believe that black fraternity branding had its roots on the African continent in scarification practices, a form of artistry that involves creating scars on the skin in decorative patterns, usually achieved by cutting and then rubbing substances on the wound. Don Spencer stated: "I figured it's . . . part of some kind of an Afrocentric connection within, you know, because if you look at, you know, history books or you look at books of people from Africa, tribes marked themselves in various ways to show that they belonged to a particular tribe. . . . I look at it as . . . belonging to a tribe of men."[28]

McCoy's research underscores this connection.[29] Her informants also mentioned that branding is often contextualized as evocative of the practice as applied to slaves or the traditional scarification rites practiced on the African continent. Although, over time, the term *scarification* has come to encompass scarring through other methods, such as branding, it originally applied solely to patterns created on the skin through cutting. No conclusive evidence exists about the continuity of voluntary branding traditions from Africa to the United States.

Although the appearance can be markedly similar to branding, techniques used as part of African customs often vary substantially. The Ga'anda in northeastern Nigeria "execute a row of incisions, the skin is pierced with an iron hook *(ngalkem)*, its point at a right angle to the shaft, and lifted into a ridge; fine, regular lines are then deftly cut across with a triangular razor *(fedeta)*. The result is a neat, delicate pattern of scars."[30] A variety of techniques are used by the Tiv of the Benue Valley in Nigeria; in one, "very deep scars [are] cut with a razor and colored black with charcoal."[31]

Whether branding in BGLOs has direct ties to these other forms of cica-

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trization (a broader term that refers to any method of scarring) is unknown, but it seems unlikely. Given the fact that the methods are so strikingly different, evidence points to voluntary branding as a twentieth-century practice that, in some cases, is consciously tied to scarification on the African continent as a symbol of pride in one's heritage, rather than constituting an actual unbroken line of tradition. McCoy's research also failed to find any solid proof of a continuous tradition of branding from Africa; instead, evidence suggests a conscious adoption of personally relevant symbolism. Certainly, not all members believe that branding has such a link, but even among those that do, the significance of the story can be positive or negative, depending on the individual's worldview. Mark Iles stated: "If you go back to the history of branding, branding first was a practice that warriors did so they could distinguish themselves in battle from one another. It was a part of that whole ritual of manhood, warrior. I don't know; I have mixed emotions about that. I think historically there's some healthy aspects to it but now I just don't think we need to be at war, particularly with one another. And we are."[32] Here again, a posited history of branding says as much about the narrator's ethos as it does about where and when the practice may have arisen. Iles's narrative suggests that he values the potential of people working together rather than the warrior ethos that men have traditionally adopted.

Many branded members have been confronted by others (both members and outsiders) with the idea that branding is associated with slavery or the marking of cattle and thus should not be adopted by free men. Indeed, the Black Code of 1685[33] stipulated that the punishment for unlawful assembly or escape could include branding with the fleur-de-lis[34] symbol on the shoulder.[35] And in Nassau, slaves were branded with the monogram of the Maurits of Nassau.[36] Essentially, whether branding in contemporary times has any direct or indirect link to cattle branding and slavery seems less important than what the practice has come to mean to individual members. Cornelius Dozier asserts, "People are always worrying about what happened a long time ago. What's going on now? That's what matters."[37] Similarly, any of these stories, whether positive or negative in connotation, tell us more about the storyteller than they do about the history of the practice.

For many BGLO members, obtaining a brand after successfully pledging and being initiated is an important symbol of their worthiness to belong to that BGLO. It signifies that the member has completed a rite of passage, a difficult ritual process that earned him the right to be a part of the organization, the communal culture. Difficult rituals add value to personal esteem and to

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the esteem the new member has for the group. As such, a brand is an important marker, or symbol, of having endured something that proves a man's worthiness to be a brother in the fraternity. Particularly for new members (of both college age and beyond), it can be a way to demonstrate deservedness despite the fact that the old pledge process has been eliminated. Hamberlin described how obtaining a brand makes this possible: "It's all about how hard did you pledge, you know, how long did it take you to be made, you know, what did you go through? And for an individual now not to have a brand, it's like you didn't go through anything."[38]

Not all BGLO members share this view, however. Ulysses Horn stated: "These guys take it on themselves. They think that's the only way you can be a real Q, which is asinine. . . . I just don't believe that you need to disfigure your body. But if it's something that people get a kick out of, fine." Horn, in fact, contended that branding's history among fraternity men is only a couple of decades old: "I was made into the fraternity in 1950 and it definitely didn't happen between 1950 and 1970. I don't remember seeing anything like that."[39] Other members, such as an anonymous informant who entered the fraternity in 1959, proved via their own brands that Horn's statement is not true, but by placing branding within a relatively recent time span, Horn reinforces his own belief that branding is of limited (if any) importance within the group.

Others do not take the history of branding back to the African continent or to the era of enslavement but place it within a more loaded sphere of events. One tale traces branding's origin to times of war. As explained by Sammy Ryan (and Alex Hogue), during World War II, before being shipped out to the front, Omegas in the armed services were branded as a way of "Omega calling back her sons." Crucial to this narrative is the idea that the U.S. government did not put much effort into identifying blacks who died in combat.[40] Thus, men branded themselves as a way of identifying their bodies during the war. A BGLO brand made it obvious to the government that a dead black soldier was a U.S. citizen. Jeffery Tarver specified that the idea originated with Colonel Charles Young, who entered the fraternity on March 8, 1912: "It was something that . . . he allowed prisoners of war to do . . . he said . . . we would not have to speak to each other specifically, but you would know that this was a brother in your fraternity by his brand."[41] Cecil Flournoy asserted that the brands were initially placed on soldiers' bodies *after* they had died to "ensure they had a proper burial" upon return.[42]

Another tale related by Dennis Earl Florence posits that branding was initially a mark of atonement for members who had erred by revealing organiza-

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tional secrets. Despite this initially negative connotation, over time, branding became popular among members who were not under disciplinary sanctions for misdeeds.[43] Thus, according to this version of history, these visible marks eventually evolved into something that was looked on as desirable and was adopted by those who had not erred, until it reached its current level of popularity. McCoy documented a parallel legend told to her by a Nigerian professor:

> The legend tells how the king of the Nupe people sent two of his warriors to recover his mother who was captured in war by a rival group. The warriors returned unsuccessful. Instead of killing them or exiling them from the tribe, the king scarred their forearms to denote their failure and disgrace to the community. They were to be outcasts. As the scars healed, women found the men's scars particularly alluring. As a result, other men in the tribe sought the same pattern of scars. In the end, the men of Nupe were soon known for their scars and found most desirable to all the women around. In turn, men of other tribes began to scar themselves to gain the admiration of women as well.[44]

Although this tale supports the theory that fraternal brands may have their symbolic roots in the scarification practices of the African continent, it also supports the theory that BGLO members consciously look to Africa for symbolism relevant to their worldview. If branding was part of a continuous tradition from one continent to another, it seems likely that the method of scarring (primarily cutting) would also be consistent with the forms documented in Africa.

## Stages of Meaning in Flux

It is undeniable that the brand itself can hold meaning for its bearer, from the simple to the complex, from the aesthetic to the symbolic. The specific circumstances of its acquisition—also known as the construction event[45]—can hold equal significance. An anonymous interviewee explained: "I normally do one when I am the dean of pledges or the intake chairman. When that line goes over or that line becomes a member of the fraternity, to let them know that I love them and what they went through was good natured and good intent[ioned], I'll be the first one to get one. And then they'll know that what I do is not [out] of spite and they don't have to do it."[46]

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Techniques of creating brands can vary, but many agree that becoming a brander requires a special skill or aptitude, such as a steady hand or artistic ability. The skills of the brander can encompass both the composition and placement of letterforms and the creation of the branding iron itself. Although most fraternity branding is done by members of the organization, the proliferation of "neo-tribal" body modification has sparked interaction with BGLOs. A branding artist in New York said that approximately 50 percent of his clientele are members of fraternities.[47]

The process of branding basically consists of the following: creation of the branding iron, selection of a pattern and body location, heating of the iron, application of the iron to the skin, touch-ups to ensure that the entire pattern is successfully transferred, and proper care of the brand during healing. Brand aesthetics include pattern, symmetry, and form of the healed tissue. Wire coat hangers are the most commonly used implements for constructing branding irons. For smaller brands, such as those applied to sorority members, paper clips may be used. Before a branding session, Ethan Robinson forms a number of coat hangers into omega brands of various sizes so that the brandee can select one that appeals to his personal taste and is an appropriate size for the body part. Robinson creates the brand by unbending the hanger and then rebending it using the neck of a bottle as a form to create the rounded loop of the letter omega. Using pliers, he bends the ends outward to form the base of the omega. Finally, he bends the remaining ends upward to create the handles by which he holds the iron during the branding process.

Occasionally, an iron that more closely resembles those used to brand cattle is used. Darryl Charles once branded someone, and was himself branded, with one of these irons, which had been made by an Omega member from Colorado who was a welder. "It probably weighed about ten pounds and was solid steel, about a half-inch thick, and the branding iron itself was probably the size of the palm of my hand, which is about four and a half, five inches tall, three or four inches wide."[48] The width of the metal that is heated and pressed on the skin significantly affects the form of the finished brand. The scar tissue that forms tends to be wider than the metal itself.

In Ethan Robinson's experience, the pattern selection process is relatively informal. Usually, brands are applied singly rather than in complex multi-omega patterns. The size of the brand, as mentioned earlier, depends mostly on the availability of irons and the size of the body part to be branded. For Darryl Butler, however, the selection process was slightly more structured. All members of Butler's line of entering pledges acquired identical brands on their left

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biceps consisting of interlaced omegas and a lightning bolt, under which were smaller chapter letters. For the opposite biceps, Butler chose a pattern from a book that illustrated a number of variations. The brands on Butler's chest, six interlaced omegas, represent his line number.

Robinson mentioned that the biceps is the usual location for the first brand, and many Omegas limit themselves to just this one. Brands received subsequently can be placed in any number of locations. Both Robinson and Butler noted that popular locations for women include the inner thigh and the bikini line, both of which are relatively private areas. Brands for women are traditionally feminized and usually smaller and can thus be viewed as more delicate than the larger brands borne by men.

Heating of the iron is often accomplished by simply holding it over the flames of a gas stove burner. If a gas stove is not available, Robinson pours rubbing alcohol into a metal pan and sets it on fire. Ricky Lewis explained that heating the iron properly not only gets it to the right temperature for branding but also helps to sterilize the instrument: "They'll burn [off] all the little stuff that comes on hangers, stick it in peroxide . . . brothers are very conscientious about that, making sure that it is sterile. Because it's a burn. You got to take care of it. You know, infection can set in and you can really cause a problem."[49]

Prior to applying the iron to the skin, the area can be slightly numbed by icing it or slapping it repeatedly. Not every brander, however, subscribes to this practice. Darryl Charles explained: "It was a mental preparation. Some people say you hit a bunch of times. Some people say you slap. Some people say you put ice. Some people say alcohol. I mean, there's so much ca-ca that goes into whether you're going to do it, when you're going to do it, how you're going to do it. A ceremonial trip like they put you through. But I didn't do anything . . . I didn't think all that other stuff was necessary."[50]

As a means of acquiring the skill to become a brander, some members practice the steady placement of the iron on flesh by dipping the unheated iron in water and then coating it with powder or flour. When a practice "hit" is made on the skin, the powder leaves its trace. Kevin Walton Sr. explained that to ensure good results, such practice runs should be done both on one's own body and on the body of the person who will receive the brand.[51] Because good technique requires a sure hand, any shakes or slips will be visible in the clarity of the brand.

Robinson often places a telephone book under the arm to be branded to minimize the curvature of the arm. Such techniques can also ensure stability and thus prevent movement during the critical moment when iron touches

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skin. Ricky Lewis described a different technique for ensuring the same thing: "The best bet's to be pinned down on something or somebody holding you because naturally . . . I see something hot coming towards me, my natural instinct is going to be to flex. To flinch. . . . One brother had my arm so I wouldn't flinch. It wasn't that he was holding me, making me do it. He was just making sure I didn't flinch because if I flinched then sometimes the iron can slide."[52] Robinson also explained that "a brand rarely comes out perfect the first time. . . . My first hit was about four hits . . . then there's no more slapping involved and there's no more icing."[53] Some advocate rolling the iron across the arm and then rolling it back to effectively brand the area twice. Rolling is believed to ensure a lasting brand. In some instances, the party to be branded deliberately seeks a lighter brand, as in the case of Robinson's "business brand," while others prefer the raised effect of the scar tissue, or keloid. Kevin Walton Sr. notes that some people deliberately hit or scratch the healing wound to encourage keloid formation.[54]

As noted earlier, the aesthetics expressed through branding can encompass not only the scar itself but also its placement on the body. Beyond location and formation, this includes concepts such as symmetry. As one example, John H. Lewis Sr. prefers the balance created by having a brand on each arm.[55]

Members describe the physical sensation of being branded differently. Some, like Billy Nichols, said that it "hurt like hell [laughs]. . . . It's how you would expect a burn to feel."[56] Others, however, either deemphasized or denied feeling pain, likening it to a "bee sting."[57] Although laying hot iron on living flesh is certainly not something to take lightly, many pointed out that the pain of branding was particularly insignificant when seen in light of the pledge process itself:

> This [branding] is like you've been studying for the CPA exam and once you study, you want the letters behind your name. This is the same thing. Once I learned the history of the fraternity, went through the process [of pledging], I want the letters. This is nothing more than the letters. At that point, I was so happy that when this happened to me, I didn't feel it. The process [of pledging] itself hurt more than getting this. This took maybe three months to heal, but once it was on, I didn't feel it.[58]

Others, however, did not minimize the pain of the branding itself and saw it as a meaningful step in becoming strong. Emil Hamberlin stated:

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> It's a third degree burn. It hurt. It hurt. It hurt. And the brothers in this fraternity, you know, we don't believe in one being intoxicated to numb the pain. No, no, no. You will be sober. You will take this pain. . . . I went through a lot of things that were more painful, like having my shoulder dislocated, you know. But by me going through my pledge process of being an Omega man, I was used to pain. I was conditioned to pain. You know, I've learned to make pain my pleasure, so to say. You know, to look at pain as something temporary. To look at pain as something that has a time. It begins and it ends. Simple.[59]

Physical sensations during the healing process were also commented on by some members. Gary Morris recalled the painful pulling he felt around his scabs whenever he moved.[60] Robinson noted that heat remains a dominant sensation more than a week after the iron has been applied.[61] Douglas S. Bell, MD, explained why this happens: "As long as the wound healing process is going on, there's still some active inflammation which causes the blood vessels in that area to dilate, so there's more blood flow and the additional blood flow is what causes the heat both immediately after you burn something and subsequently."[62]

Brands can vary substantially, because different techniques are used to place the iron—from light hits to a back-and-forth roll—and people heal in different ways, with some having a tendency to form keloid while others do not. Some are so light, like Robinson's business brand, that they are almost invisible. Other brands rise up off the skin in a bas-relief of Greek letters.[63] In some cases, the results are intentional, in others happenstance; in many cases, it is undoubtedly a combination of both.

Once a brand has been applied to the skin, it becomes a means of "material communication"—the physical vehicle for the transmission of the bearer's message to others. It is a visible sign that not only communicates one's membership in the organization but also demonstrates that one has certain qualities affiliated with that organization, such as toughness.

Because branding involves many individuals in a multiplicity of situations and contexts, there is no universal experience or meaning that can be ascribed to branding within BGLOs. As Jones states in *Studying Organizational Symbolism:*

> Although most research on organizational symbolism concerns institutions and culture, and dwells on "social" constructions and "shared" meanings or values, the behavior of individuals and the uniqueness of events

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> are essential considerations . . . just as each person uses familiar symbols uniquely, so is each instance of symbolic behavior situationally idiosyncratic, with the purpose, setting, and number and nature of people involved all determining what form an example of symbolic behavior takes and what its meanings are.[64]

Thus, the brand cannot be viewed as complete in its isolated physical form. It is a material locus of continued interaction and reinterpretation. Although summarizing the responses of different people to various aspects of the brand can illustrate how disparate views can be, only by looking at the experiences of individuals over time can we come closer to understanding what branding means. This method acknowledges that although actions are often culturally shaped, each person draws on multiple influences that differ from one individual to another.

## Portrait of a Branding Artist

Ethan Robinson is an apt example of how interpretations of personal symbols can develop and change. The role of brands and branding in his life has continued to evolve over the decade-plus he has been a fraternity member. These meanings, in turn, are intimately tied to both his ongoing personal development and his history in and away from the fraternity.

Robinson said that he did not intend to join a fraternal organization, yet he did so almost as soon as he entered college at the University of California–Berkeley. This shift in attitude was attributable to a change in Robinson's racial and political consciousness. When a secretary at his high school had tried to conceal a scholarship from him because she did not agree with its racial bias, his eyes were opened to the fact that racism was still a problem in contemporary society.

After that incident, his general movement was from non-Afrocentric activities, attitudes, and affiliations to more Afrocentric ones, but this was not the case with the religion he adopted. He was drawn to Buddhism because of its commitment to ending human suffering. His choice of religion makes him somewhat of an anomaly within Omega Psi Phi, which incorporates Christianity into its organizational practices,[65] yet the aspects of the faith that attracted him are remarkably consistent with his growing awareness of racial issues: a recognition of humans' suffering paired with practical ways of deal-

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ing with that suffering. Just as Buddhism addressed his concerns about fair treatment and the "uplift" of his fellow men, so too did his involvement in Omega Psi Phi. His brands literally *embody* these values.

From the time he first pledged to the present day, Robinson obtained Omega brands on both biceps, his right forearm, both calves, his left pectoral muscle, and his posterior. Those who, like Robinson, become branders are often perceived to be artisans who develop the specialized skills needed for the task.

Initially, Robinson preferred brands that did not result in keloids, but as he was exposed to brands in varying forms, his aesthetic sense evolved and his branding technique changed to accommodate it. Over the years, Robinson came to appreciate keloid brands more and smooth brands less; he even had some of his own brands reapplied. His newfound appreciation of keloids has its own aesthetic framework: bigger "amorphous" keloids are seen as "disgusting," while more "defined" keloids are pleasing due to the clarity of the Greek letter. Robinson also stresses the importance of the brand's being proportional to the body part on which it is placed.

Among those who choose to be branded, as well as those who choose to become branding artists, both the event and the result of branding can be meaningful. Jones holds that "objects command attention not as isolated phenomena but as products of activities, embodiments of otherwise intangible processes, or palpable stimuli that trigger responses."[66] Thus, studying the brand itself in isolation from how it was created and how it continues to be used would bar us from understanding most of its meaning. Issues dealt with earlier, such as display, illustrate what Jones terms "material communication." Jones calls acts of creation "construction events." To many BGLO members, the construction event is a bonding experience that gives rise to, or arises out of, a state of *communitas*.[67]

Robinson's most recent experience with branding is an apt illustration of why the analysis of construction events is so critical. This event was by no means typical, and in fact, there is no such thing; each event is a unique conglomeration of participant attitudes and situational idiosyncrasies. Just as no two brands are identical, no two construction events are the same. And just as Robinson's opinions of the brands themselves have changed over time, so too has his attitude toward the construction event. When I first met with him, he stressed that although nonfraternity members might be present in the building while branding was taking place, they could not be present when the iron actually hit flesh. In this most recent instance, however, nonfraternity mem-

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bers actually witnessed the act. Robinson's personal living circumstances necessitated that the branding be done at a nonfraternity friend's home, which meant that he needed to be considerate of that friend's comfort. Enforcing the privacy rule in a friend's home would have been alienating or rude to his host, so the family became active participants, assisting in the icing process prior to branding, contributing aesthetic judgments on the finished brands, and adding to the atmosphere and drama of the event through commentary during the process. This anecdote illustrates how Robinson's view of construction events and secrecy evolved over time.

The idea of construction events is crucial to the assertion that, in studying BGLO brands, we are studying more than the artistry of brands. An analysis of art looks at more than an object or even the culture it comes from; it encompasses individual motivations and outside interpretations, the branding artist as well as the subject to be branded, and how the significance changes over time, from before the brand is placed to decades later when it fades (or doesn't). By looking at brands not as static physical forms that possess meaning in and of themselves but as a locus of communication, interaction, self-definition, and redefinition, we can begin to understand the dynamic quality not just of brands but of all material forms. Meaning is found in conceptualization, acts of creation, and in continued use. Each "object" is reconfigured by the specific contexts of specific times.

## Conclusion

We begin our lives with only our bodies, which are clothed, fed, and otherwise nurtured. Initially, these decisions are made for us, by families, cultures, circumstances. In time, we assert our individual wills on our bodies, making a series of decisions about what will go on them and in them, what we will do with them, where and how we will push them. We may adorn them, pierce them, tone them, or otherwise shape them. As the interface between the world and ourselves, our bodies are both our captors and our vehicles. Genetically predisposed to gendered and colored spheres that then become culturally determined limits, no amount of adornment or modification can completely alter who we are perceived to be. Yet the body is still the intersection between the self and other, between individual and group. What we do to our bodies and how we present our bodies to the world subtly shape both how we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. It negotiates for us, and without

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speaking, it communicates what we do and do not accept about societal standards and expectations. It can help us meet these expectations or challenge them. It can be the symbol by which we express who we do and do not feel connected to. It can bond us to and alienate us from others.

As bell hooks states, "Aesthetics then is more than a philosophy or theory of art and beauty; it is a way of inhabiting space, a particular location, a way of looking and becoming."[68] By intentionally placing marks on their bodies, the men of Omega Psi Phi remind themselves and others of what has happened not just *to* them but also *because of* them. Each moment that we move through our worlds, our realities are created and recreated anew. Although we can physically alter our bodies in a search for permanence, meanings are altered and reformed in each new instance or interaction.

In a society where definitions of our selves are often enforced from without, asserting our individual identities and convictions can be a continual struggle. Stereotypes label us, restrictive laws and attitudes block our forward motion. Inscribing personal symbols on our bodies, with the hope that they will "burn me deep," be "lasting," and "be in you," can be a strikingly meaningful act against these external limitations. We define ourselves by altering our very physical structures, and these modifications can mark a particular time, a relationship, a set of convictions, or innumerable other things we value as individuals. Whether we challenge societal and group norms or accept them, the intentionally placed marks on our flesh are our own decisions made manifest in physical form. They symbolize an assertion of our individual will upon our lives. Although their meanings can change over time, just as the scars can fade, they embody a sense of commitment and permanence in an uncertain and impermanent world.

## Acknowledgments

This research project was supported, in part, by an Arnold Rubin Award from the Fowler Museum of Cultural History. I presented my findings on branding and other forms of body art at meetings of the California Folklore Society (1996 and 1997), the American Folklore Society (1996), and the American Studies Association (2003). I first began researching this subject in a class on African American folklore taught at UCLA by Beverly Robinson, herself a member of Delta Sigma Theta, the sister organization to Omega Psi Phi. This chapter is dedicated to her memory.

Material for this chapter was largely drawn from my dissertation, "The Body Art

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of Brotherhood: Branding in an African American Fraternity" (UCLA, 1999), written under the guidance of Michael Owen Jones, Donald J. Cosentino, and Valerie Matsumoto. A portion of the fieldwork was conducted jointly with Carol Branch. A related article, "Burning Messages: Interpreting African American Fraternity Brands and Their Bearers," was published in *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore* (Fall 2004).

More than sixty members of Omega Psi Phi contributed to this research; they came from many places across the United States and spanned a wide range of ages (born between 1918 and 1970). Participation ranged from being photographed to submitting to extensive interviews over the course of several months. In particular, Ethan Robinson met with me at his workplace and his home multiple times, generously sharing his knowledge and experiences. He would even call me after he acquired new brands and allow me to take photographs through each stage of the healing process. Three others, Darryl Butler, Ricky L. Lewis, and an anonymous official, graciously assisted me in making new contacts within the organization. Conducting research within secrecy-laden organizations about controversial topics requires extreme patience, perseverance, and a willingness to learn from those who consent to share their knowledge to the extent that they are able without violating their organization's bond of secrecy. Without the help of these men, this study would not exist. For the purpose of comparison, I also interviewed several men from traditionally white fraternities who bore brands and tattoos, and several others who chose body modification for other symbolic purposes. This documentation is supplemented by hundreds of slides covering tattoos, brands, material behavior, and related phenomena. The research on branding and other types of body art is ongoing.

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63. In bas-relief sculpture, the images are sculpted on a flat surface, protruding only enough to suggest a three-dimensional perspective.

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# 10

## Calls

### An Inquiry into Their Origin, Meaning, and Function

*Marcella L. McCoy*

It is three o'clock on a Friday afternoon on the campus of Morgan State University in the late 1980s. Most classes have already been dismissed. The weather is warm, and members of black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) are assembled amidst a large crowd of other students continually vying for spots that will provide a good view. Students dressed in T-shirts and jackets in color combinations of black and gold, pink and green, purple and gold, red and white, blue and white, blue and gold, and brown and gold await their entry onto the stepping platform. After a brief routine of calling of all sorors to the floor, a group of sorority members enters the informal, outdoor space in front of the student center to perform a routine step, while spectators watch from the rails of the campus's famous social space, "the bridge."

> STEP MASTER: Sorors!
> SORORS: Yeeeees?!
> STEP MASTER: I said, my *Sorors!*
> SORORS: Yeeeeees?!
> STEP MASTER: What is a Delta?
> SORORS: What is a Delta?!
> STEP MASTER: Theeeey want to know! [points to the crowd]
> SORORS: Aaaaa . . . Delta *is* what an AKA ain't [AKA calls from the audience], what a Zeta wants to be, and what a Sigma can't [Zeta and Sigma calls from the audience], what the Alphas like, what the Kappas love [Alpha and Kappa calls from the audience], and what the Que Psi Phis can't get enough of [Omega or Que barking call]. Oo-oop! Oo-oop! [Delta performers call, integrated in the step routine]
> STEP MASTER: I said who are we?
> SORORS: We are the fresh-fly girls of DST and all the other girls want to



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be like me. We are the fresh-fly girls of DST and all the other girls want to be like me. We are the fresh-fly girls—

STEP MASTER (interrupting): OOOOOOOO-OOP! [loud and long]

SORORS: What is it, Soror?

STEP MASTER: Sorors, I hear . . . [dramatic pause] there are AKAs on the yard! [AKA calls from the audience]

SORORS: But the Deltas run *this* yard! You'd better look, look 'fore you get your man took. You'd better look, look 'fore you get your man took. We're not conceited, we're just convinced! If you don't like it, then kiss our Oooooo-oop! [spectator Delta members join in the call]

This group performs a few more steps, then relinquishes the space to the next group that is ready to step. As the next group takes the "stage," calls as peculiar and distinct as the Deltas' Ooo-oop! fill the air, coming from members of all the organizations assembled, accompanied by applause from the crowd. This spectacle is recreated on campuses across the nation where BGLOs enjoy spirited competition. In this example, the group's call is incorporated into the step show. Also, nonstepping members who are present do the call in support of the stepping sorors. Throughout the performance, other BGLO members deliver their calls in response to the mention of their organizations, to affirm the reference or to drown out an insult.

At any public gathering where BGLO members are present, it is not uncommon to hear loud vocal utterances, or calls, shouted across a room. In classic call-and-response style, someone initiates a call; this is an invitation to other members of that BGLO, regardless of where they are in the room, to respond in like fashion to denote their membership in the organization and their presence at the event. This sets off a chain reaction as other BGLOs also make their presence known with their unique calls and responses. Immediately, it is apparent to all assembled that black Greeks are present.

Despite their public usage, not much is known about calls. Casual observers and outsiders know only what can be gleaned from witnessing the use of calls in public venues such as step shows. How and why were calls started? Why did organizations choose their particular calls? What do calls mean, and how do they function? To find the answers to these questions, twenty members of BGLOs who joined as undergraduates at historically black colleges and universities between 1941 and 1994 were interviewed about the use of calls.[1] Although their views may not provide a complete picture, they do provide a

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useful starting point for understanding BGLO calls, how they originated, what they mean, and how they function.

## What Is a Call?

Calls, along with organizational colors, commonly serve as introductory features to BGLOs. Calls are vocal utterances, either words or sounds, coined for use by the respective organizations. They can be loud, bizarre, distinctive, disturbing, and imposing. At the same time, they can be comforting, exciting, and prideful expressions of their performers' license, skill, and very presence. Calls are diverse in pitch and sound, ranging from a howl or a bark to a screech or a whistle. It is understood that nonmembers do not use the call, because it is viewed as offensive and disrespectful toward the organization that has coined it. The call is used to acknowledge and greet another member who is some distance away, to avoid yelling that person's name. It is used to get the attention of another member and as a form of affirmation or approval in place of applause when members of various BGLOs are present. Common usage involves one member initiating the call and the member or members being addressed replying with the same call or another responding call. At gatherings where many groups are assembled, such as a step show, one or a few members of a BGLO will begin doing the call, perhaps during applause for their team's performance; then others start the call. Sometimes the members start the call at different times to avoid a break in the call when others can no longer hold the note. This ensures the continuity of the call and the dominance of that group at that moment.

Both sororities and fraternities have their own distinctive calls, but the sorority calls require more vocal agility and dexterity due to the higher pitches. Table 10.1 describes the calls for the nine BGLOs. As can be seen, each organization has a distinctive call for the exclusive use of its members.

Hand signals are used to accompany or substitute for the call in many situations. It is not uncommon to see members form the symbol of the group with their hands when posing for a photograph, especially if they are not wearing paraphernalia. The same exclusive rules of ownership that apply to calls apply to the use of hand signals.

Calls are significant to BGLOs because they are used as an alternative mode of member identification. This form of oral, but not quite verbal, identi-

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Table 10.1. Calls for the Nine BGLOs

| | *Call* | *Response* |
|---|---|---|
| *Sororities* (varied pitches, long vowels, often held as long as possible for effect) | | |
| Alpha Kappa Alpha | Skee-wee! | Skee-wee! (extremely high pitch, difficult to reach) |
| Delta Sigma Theta | Oo-oop! | Oo-oop! (moderate pitch) |
| Zeta Phi Beta | Ee-i-kee! | Ee-i-kee! (high pitch) |
| Sigma Gamma Rho | Ee-yip! Eeeep! | Ee-yip! Eeeeep! |
| *Fraternities* (all with low pitch and elongated delivery) | | |
| Alpha Phi Alpha | A Phi! | 06! (partial name and founding year) |
| | 19! (one nine) | 06! (oh six) |
| Omega Psi Phi | Ahr, Ahr! | Ahr, Ahr! (continuous, simulated dog barking) |
| Kappa Alpha Psi | Yo, Yo! | Yo, Yo! |
| Phi Beta Sigma | Ouwa! | Ouwa! (ow-oo-wa) |
| | Blue Phi | You Know! |
| Iota Phi Theta | Ow-Ow! | Ow-Ow! (rhymes with "wow") |

fication is in keeping with the highly oral African and African American culture. The BGLO call, used to communicate acknowledgment, approval, greeting, instruction, and presence, functions in addition to standard methods of achieving these ends. The BGLO call can also act as a catalyst to a formal introduction of members, replace a wave of the hand or the use of someone's name in greeting from a distance, be used as a substitute for or in conjunction with applause or cheering, and be employed to start or stop group movement.

Because only BGLO members use calls, they function not only as a means of communication but also as a means of identifying the parties as members of a specific group. Finally, because calls are used in public, they make declarative and associative statements, thus functioning to affirm to everyone within earshot the identity of both the sender and the intended receiver of the message.

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## Calls as Public Rituals

Members and nonmembers familiar with calls might dismiss them as insignificant outgrowths of the BGLO culture. Although many other public features of BGLO campus life (marching and chanting in line, uniform dress and behavior, and public displays) were outlawed with the banning of pledging in 1990, a few still remain as easy identifiers of BGLO membership. Some might think that conceptualizing these practices as "ritual" gives them more attention than they deserve, but that is often the nature of ritual. A ritual is an act to which someone gives meaning, emotion, and order but that may seem insignificant to others. How does an act become ritual, and who decides what ritual is?

Several works demonstrate the meaning, function, and role of rituals. The explanations by various anthropologists offer a framework for rituals that includes calls and other BGLO traditions. The basic dictionary definition of *ritual* is the "observance of set forms in public worship; . . . prescribed, established, or ceremonial acts or features collectively; . . . any practice or pattern of behavior regularly performed in a set manner."[2] Calls fit this textual definition.

### PUBLIC RITUALS DEFINED

Public rituals are defined as traditions performed or displayed in open, public areas. Ritual theorist Ronald Grimes's definition offers a succinct description of the interdependent yet separate relationship of the spectators and actors in the performance of public ritual. In general, "public ritual is distinguished by its interstitial position on the threshold between open and closed groups—by its aim to tend the gate which swings in toward those who are ritual initiators and out toward ritual strangers."[3] In the case of BGLOs, public rituals tend to be traditions that are common among members but are not sanctioned as official elements of the organization's profile or program. Some of the details might vary by geographic region, but in general, they tend to be recognized by members. The traditions are displayed or performed openly in front of audiences of members and nonmembers, but it is understood that nonmembers do not perform these specific acts. It is a rite of passage to be able to participate in the call and identify oneself as a member by its use and other public rituals. As a tradition performed only after the rite of passage into full membership, calls are public BGLO rituals.

As an example of the dynamics involved in public rituals, E. B. Brown and

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G. D. Kimball discussed the role of parades among African Americans in Richmond, Virginia, after the Civil War.[4] The parades were performed by militia units of men and women marching in large or small groups and performing drill routines in the city streets; they were central features of black life in Richmond through the turn of the twentieth century. Occasions for the parades included but were not limited to funerals, society mass meetings, fraternal conventions, and holidays such as Emancipation Day (April 3). Brown and Kimball stated that "these public rituals suggest ways in which black Richmonders worked to create a sense of community among widespread and disparate people with competing needs and interests."[5] According to Timothy Kelly, public rituals help the participants bolster the cultural walls that preserve their heritage while enabling them to cope with difficult transitions. In general, public rituals enable various groups to assert their differences from their neighbors, and they engender social pride.[6]

Like the Richmond parades and other public rituals, BGLO calls express distinctive cultural views, are aimed inward at the community that performs them as an avowal of loyalty, and serve to bind that community to values and traditions than can sustain them in alien and often hostile environments. For BGLO members, public ritual has meant affirming their bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood, preserving their traditions as distinct from those of other organizations, and engendering a degree of social pride. Because many of the early BGLO chapters were chartered at predominantly white campuses, it is plain to see why such public rituals would create community among the African American students there. As BGLOs chartered chapters at historically black colleges and universities, the ritual of calls served the same function on those campuses, though some have criticized the organizational culture for being part of an elitist system of exclusion.

## HOW RITUALS FUNCTION

According to pioneering social scientists, rituals and ritual attitudes generally serve clear functions. For instance, the function of rituals may or may not be intended or recognized by the practitioners, but functions sometimes "emerge largely out of the theoretical analysis of the social scientist."[7] Rituals also follow basic models or patterns that communicate and affirm certain universals of human culture.[8] Moreover, rituals offer a way for people to express their tremendous dependence on continuity for their sense of identity and their ability to draw on their own memories and the faith of those around them. "It is by draw-

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ing on such memories that a sense of identity, security, and continuity is assured."[9] The ritual act recreates the emotion experienced in the past.

Consistent with the idea that rituals serve a specific function is that the calls clearly affirm group identity. Regardless of whether that affirmation of identity is intended or recognized at the time of the performance, BGLO members can articulate identity affirmation as a function of this practice. This definition of the function of rituals, which was articulated by Margaret Meade in "Ritual and Social Crisis,"[10] is demonstrated by BGLO members' expression of the importance of passing on older traditions, observing protocol in practicing new traditions, and preserving the essence of evolving traditions. In addition to describing instances when they perform such rituals, members spoke of the emotion and nostalgia they felt when discussing them.

Meade also suggests that rituals involve a fair amount of repetitious and bodily behavior that occurs in the presence of others involved in the same action:

> Ritual is concerned with relationships, either between a single individual and the supernatural, or among a group of individuals who share things together. There is something about the sharing and the expectation that makes it ritual. . . . Another important aspect about ritual is that its performers have done it before, in some cases to the point of habit. Any change in the ritual dislocates the people who have participated in it previously and is, therefore, resisted. Changes inevitably upset one: throw one out of that semiautomatic type of behavior which is only partly conscious and they project the participant into too great a consciousness.[11]

It is precisely the repetition and the concern with relationships that make calls features of BGLO affiliation that are recognizable to both members and nonmembers. If repetition among the groups were not an important element, use of the call would seem an isolated and arbitrary act to observers and a source of confusion among members.

As in many larger societies, in BGLOs, change is inevitable and is usually met with resistance. Even with regard to the unofficial tradition of calls discussed here, there is disagreement regarding their usage. For example, older members might frown on performing the call at the close of an official sorority song, viewing it as inappropriate to the sanctity of the song, while others might welcome the added flair. In any case, when a change is implemented, offended participants are often dislocated from the habitual pattern and focus on the change, not the collective involvement.

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> The projection into too great a consciousness results in a participant . . . being robbed of the particular state of bliss and security that seemed previously guaranteed. Only if a ritual is conducted in the order and accompanied by the same gestures, will the same feeling of security be present. It is this security which integrates, for all who have previously experienced the ritual, the past with the present, and at the same time exhibits to the novices, who have never before experienced it, what they are to feel.[12]

This idea represents the source of contention between older and newer members regarding calls and a host of other issues. Many older members argue that younger members have taken things too far.[13]

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RITUAL AWARENESS

Unlike other public rituals that are known to all members and are performed to denote group membership and solidarity, BGLO calls, though ritualistic in function, often exclude some BGLO members. Since BGLO calls did not exist from the beginning, have changed over time, and vary by geographic region, older members are often less familiar with them. This point is illustrated by a hypothetical situation described by a member of Zeta Phi Beta sorority who was initiated in 1957: A younger soror tries to get her attention using a call. However, because the older member is unfamiliar with the call, she does not understand why the young woman is making the noise. In this situation, there is a lack of "ritual awareness."[14] What makes an act a ritual is the group's awareness of the ritual and the meaning behind it. When ritual actions lack awareness and fail to recreate the associated emotional intensity, they are little more than empty ceremonies. Such is the case in the example given; because the older member was not aware that the call was part of a ritual of her organization, it was an empty expression of noise.

To take this hypothetical situation further, if the older member does not know the call (i.e., lacks ritual awareness), the ritual becomes ineffective, and she cannot be held accountable for not reciprocating the greeting her soror initiated. The soror who initiated the call might make any number of assumptions about the lack of a response. She might correctly assume that the other person does not know the call and try to get her attention another way. She might surmise that the other soror is hearing impaired or perhaps wearing headphones. The soror giving the call might think that the other woman is ignoring her—a horrid breach of protocol, as members are always expected to

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greet each other warmly. In the worst-case scenario, the calling soror might suspect that the other person is a fake, a nonmember who is disregarding the exclusivity of sorority membership by wearing paraphernalia and pretending to be a member. All these possibilities illustrate the importance of ritual awareness. Without it, BGLO calls are not only empty but can be interpreted in a variety of negative ways.

Rituals are also related to the development of social structure because they are a form of communication, "a language in which societies discuss a variety of matters. It [ritual] deals with the relationships a [person] has to other[s], to institutions, spirits, and nature, and with all the various permutations of which these themes are capable."[15] Public rituals are often contextualized by nonmembers who serve as audience, background, observers, and sometimes qualifiers. In situations in which members are not communicating with one another, calls are often communications to the public to help nonmembers distinguish, recognize, and identify one group among many. In the past, rituals were viewed as "a fixed matrix into which generations were poured."[16] Today, despite some strong resistance to change, there is a greater realization that rituals evolve over time. For example, some BGLO calls vary by geographic region, but all members recognize the variations and acknowledge them as valid. According to Meade, "members of the younger generation today have . . . sensed the lack of ritual in our lives, and have attempted to restore it."[17] This has certainly been the case with BGLO calls, as they have evolved over time and from place to place. Meade's statement might also be prophetic. With the banning of the pledge process in 1990, much of what made the undergraduate BGLO experience intriguing is now missing. This might result in the development of new calls and other rituals to fill the gap.

## The African Origin of Calls

Many have speculated that calls originated in Africa. Very little is known about the cultural associations between African rituals and calls in general or BGLO calls in particular. It is clear, however, that there are many similarities in the way calls were historically used in Africa and they way they are used by BGLOs in the United States. This fact has led many to speculate that BGLO calls are an adaptation of an African cultural element.

In Africa, calls were used to communicate one's presence over long distances. For example, Akil, a Ghanaian American who is a member of Alpha

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Phi Alpha fraternity, described how calls are used by farming communities in Ghana. He explained that farmers work in huge fields, so everyone has an informal call or a special pitch to let others in the field know that they are there. One person initiates a call to find out where neighboring workers are, because there is an ever-present threat of intruders stealing the crops. When a farmer performs the call, he or she is communicating, "I'm here today, are you there today?" Others respond with their unique calls to identify their location. Akil said, "One does the call, then listens for responses. Others respond with their calling card. You use the same call every time to distinguish you. If you are not heard, something might be wrong and someone can go check things out. . . . It was like our telephone system in the field."[18]

In addition to noting how calls functioned in Africa as a means of communication, various scholars have observed that there are different types of calls: whoops, calls, cries, and arwhoolies. Whooping, which can be described as a form of yodeling, was a traditional practice among the tribes of the Congo and Angola, where it was employed as musical embellishment. Cries and arwhoolies were sung in the fields by slaves in America. Daniel Kingman describes calls and cries of the field as "highly individualized expressions for communication, for relieving loneliness, for giving vent to feelings, or simply for expressing the fact of one's existence."[19] And, as has been described, calls were used in the fields of Ghana as a means of communication and protection. According to William Barlow, the different types of calls vocalized the field hand's mood and identity.[20] In fact, cries, calls, and hollers can still be heard in Africa today.

## The Emergence of Calls in the United States

Those who link BGLO calls with Africa trace the emergence of calls in the United States to the experience of slavery. Africans enslaved in this country brought their calls with them and continued to use them as a means of communicating with one another, protecting themselves from danger, and expressing emotion. Eileen Southern, in *The Music of Black Americans,* noted, "a slave's call or cry could mean any one of a number of things: a call for water, food, or help, a call to let others know where he was working, or simply a cry of loneliness, sorrow, or happiness. One cry might be answered by another from a place far distant."[21] This is consistent with Fred Olmsted's account of his 1853 travels in South Carolina, which he later published in *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States:* "Suddenly one [a slave] raised such a sound as I had never heard before,

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a long, loud musical shout, rising and falling, and breaking into falsetto, his voice ringing through the woods in the clear frosty night air, like a bugle call. As he finished, the melody was caught up by another, and then, another, and then, by several in chorus."[22] In *Negro Folk Music,* Harold Courlander makes a distinction between calls and cries. Although both were used for communication, he comments that calls were used "to communicate messages—to call people to work or to attract the attention of others," whereas cries were used as "a form of self expression, the cry of an individual attempting to verbalize, or . . . vocalize his feelings."[23] Both forms existed in slavery.

This means of communication persisted after slavery as well. According to Lawrence Levine, after slavery, the number of African Americans who worked alone or in small groups grew, and the resultant spatial isolation increased the need for field hollers as a means of communication.[24] He cited Lydia Parrish's memories of African American farmworkers in southern New Jersey during the 1870s and 1880s hollering to one another: "The call was peculiar and I always wondered how they came by such a strange form of vocal gymnastics, since I never heard a white person do anything like it."[25] Usually—though not always—field hollers were without words. They articulated attitudes or consisted of the isolated statements of one person. But when other workers were present, field hollers found responses.[26]

Once slavery ended and African Americans began to migrate to the North, views and uses of calls changed. The discourse of northern African Americans seemed to call for a renegotiation of the value of African American folkways, and calls became a part of that discourse. No longer seen as an essential means of communication, calls came to be viewed with scorn and derision by African Americans in the North. For example, Jon Spencer wrote that the *Chicago Defender* newspaper commentaries often included opinions that the city was "not the place to give an old southern 'holler.'"[27] One writer chided southern newcomers to "stop whooping from one end of the street car to the other. You are not on a plantation, nor in a minstrel show before an audience."[28]

Also weighing in on the appropriateness of calls were poet Langston Hughes and author Zora Neale Hurston. In Hughes's weekly column in the *Chicago Defender,* he criticized "whooping" in public and concluded that "whooping and loud talk [were] inappropriate in the sophisticated city."[29] According to Spencer, Hughes had "a sincere appreciation for African American folkways, but did not stop to think that the allegedly loud speaking voice of southern African Americans might have been of value in the noisy city."[30] Spencer used Hughes's reference to Hurston's interpretation to counter this criticism:

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> Miss Zora Neale Hurston once said that loudness of the Negro voice is probably a carryover from Africa where most people live mostly out-of-doors and use the human voice to call to each other across vast distances, having no telephones. She also said that life in the American South helped to sustain this traditional vocal strength, because people work in big fields, mostly live in cabins and small houses, and often have no telephones either, so they just step out on the back porch and holler four houses down across three vacant lots to a neighbor concerning what is on their minds at the moment.[31]

## Adoption of Calls by Black Greek-Letter Organizations

There is considerable lack of clarity on the origins of calls among BGLO members. Calls are such a long-standing part of BGLOs that some members simply do not know how they got started. Based on interviews with BGLO members, it appears that the use of calls began in the 1960s and spread over a number of years until it became commonplace at undergraduate chapters all over the United States.[32] What is not clear, however, is why BGLO calls were developed. Some speculate that calls originated on predominantly white campuses as a technique of masked communication and identification. Barbara, a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority who joined in the early 1960s, recalled that undergraduate chapters used the calls during civil rights demonstrations to initiate or stop an action such as marching or chanting. In the crowded and noisy environment of demonstrations, calls were effective because they were loud, could be easily distinguished from anything else that was being said, and could be heard for quite a distance without a megaphone or microphone.[33] With the use of different calls for each group, members of BGLOs could be recognized unofficially or identified among their peers for their public efforts in the civil rights, anti-Vietnam, and Black Power movements.

In a completely different context, Walter Kimbrough found in his research that as early as 1950, members of Omega Psi Phi had adopted a full-fledged association between their pledges and dogs. Although most BGLOs used derogatory names such as worms, plugs, barbarians, apes, or dogs to describe their pledges, Omega Psi Phi's pledges "could be seen on college campuses wearing dog collars and leashes, drinking from bowls, and barking."[34]

Others speculate that calls grew out of the pledge atmosphere of undergraduate BGLO chapters. For example, according to respondents in a 1994

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focus group, prior to 1990, when initiation required participation in a pledge process, calls were used by BGLO members as a way of communicating with pledges. Although pledges were not permitted to perform the calls, they were expected to respond to BGLO members, who often used the call to get their attention. According to focus group participants, calls were always an indicator that a big brother or big sister was nearby. At the conclusion of the pledge process, calls also served as one of the initial indicators that a new group of initiates was being presented to the university campus. Focus group respondents explained that when the campus was awakened by an outcry of calls, everyone knew for sure that a new group of pledges had completed the process and become BGLO members.[35]

## To Call or Not to Call?

The opposing views of Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston can be heard today among BGLO members. Much like Hughes, many older BGLO members view calls as frivolous and unnecessary, whereas those who joined after calls were adopted see them as integral to BGLOs and, like Hurston, value the role they play. A few are indifferent to the use of calls.

In one interview, a member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority who joined at Tuskegee in 1953 explained that formality had permeated her undergraduate environment, and she suggested that sororities reevaluate their use of calls and eliminate them unless they are part of an onstage routine.[36] A younger male respondent, a member of Omega Psi Phi fraternity initiated at Jackson State University in 1989, regarded calls as a youthful aspect of the BGLO culture that members use less as they mature.[37]

In another interview, a 1950 initiate of Omega Psi Phi fraternity who pledged at Livingstone College described a national meeting in the early 1990s where the issue of calls was addressed. There, it was decided that although members could use the call to alert others of trouble, the national organization still frowned on its use.[38] According to this respondent, younger members at the meeting valued the continued use of calls. Even younger members who no longer do their calls express acceptance for their use and respect for their place in BGLO culture.[39]

What do members who adamantly oppose the use of the call do when another member uses it to greet them? "Not unless we're at a regional [meeting] or Boulé do grads do the call much. If they get together sometimes, you

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hear it now and then. But if we're at regional, then we respond in kind because of our younger people."[40] Protocol dictates that BGLO members respond to calls initiated by members of their BGLO, even if they disagree with their use. However, since calls are unofficial and are actually frowned on by some BGLO officials, members might respond to a call with another form of greeting, such as, "Hello, soror [or frat]," an embrace, or, if distance is an issue, a wave. The use of an alternative greeting is also appropriate if, for instance, a BGLO member is unable to perform the call skillfully.

### PROTOCOL AND EXPECTATIONS

Although some BGLO members argue that the calls themselves are against protocol, those BGLO members who value the use of calls adhere to general rules regarding their use. There are informal guidelines about the times and places where it is inappropriate to use calls. For example, it is inappropriate to use the call outside of an academic building while classes are in session, in close proximity of a faculty procession into a convocation or church service, or when indoors. "As new members join with their own new and creative ideas, protocol changes over time. We are groups of individuals. When you have individuals, they bring their own ideas that affect that organization. So what happens is the creative ideas that people bring to the organization are employed and traditions change. The problem comes when things affect protocol, but these dynamics are okay."[41] As new ideas regarding calls are developed and incorporated into BGLOs, new protocols and expectations are also developed so that the use of calls remains an important but respectful aspect of BGLO culture.

### EXCLUSIVITY OF CALLS

Among the National Pan-Hellenic Council–affiliated organizations, it is looked on very unfavorably for a nonmember to feign membership or to assume the privilege of performing any of the public rituals. For example, a college student who is well aware of the "code" and decides to do an organization's call would face hostile and possibly violent opposition. Nonmembers who choose to violate an official tradition, such as wearing the symbols of a specific BGLO on clothing or accessories, can expect to be relieved of that item or called to task for the violation. This stringent protection of group identifier ownership is not uncommon in the United States, nor is it unique to BGLOs.

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Numerous unofficial codes of behavior, honor, and silence exist in U.S. culture, such as those among academic institutions, prisons, ethnic and racial groups, economic classes, religious orders, sanctioned and unsanctioned violence and crime groups, street gangs, the military, organized crime "families" and industries (e.g., drugs, numbers, prostitution), police officers, and gender groups. One could find examples of such codes being observed and broken, as well as how the violated community dealt with the perpetrators, in any film on U.S. slavery, the civil rights movement, organized crime, high-level government politics, or even orthodox religions.

Often, outsiders or newcomers to the college scene do not understand how seriously members take their traditions. One member told of the call being mocked by children on the street and by a first-year college student seated behind her sorority members at a step show. In the case of the children, the response was laughter; in the case of the student, the young women in front of her responded with a look and a wry smile.[42] Members sometimes simply explain the call to people who mock it, and once that is done, people generally respect the request not to mimic the call.[43] Others describe what can happen when members are not so understanding or when people deliberately try to feign membership. It is taken as a personal offense when a nonmember attempts to participate in any of the public rituals or traditions.[44] Meade's assessment of ritual as having an extra degree of intensity is indicative of members' response to such perpetrators.

For younger members, communication and identification are both the meaning and the function of calls. Calls communicate endearment, pride, and support to fellow members. Doing the calls means letting everyone on campus know that they are members. At every opportunity—in greeting, at step shows—members do the call to let everyone know that they are present. Members who are familiar with the call but do not use it still acknowledge that hearing it lets them know that a member is in the vicinity. The few members who are less familiar with the call still recognize it as a means of getting the attention of another member.

Three fraternity members reported incidents they had witnessed at campus gatherings or Greek picnics where hundreds or even thousands of BGLO members reunite annually to socialize. Such gatherings always attract many people who are not affiliated with BGLOs, and nonmembers are welcome to enjoy the fellowship. However, these members reported occasions, when nonmembers feigned membership, perhaps not realizing that there is more to being a member than wearing a lettered T-shirt or cap. Inquiries by authentic

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members regarding initiation chapter, symbols, and the identity of other members ascertained who the impostors were. In each case, the incident ended in physical violence, with the perpetrators being severely beaten by fraternity members. Similar instances occur with women feigning sorority membership.[45]

Calls also serve as a precursor to identifying a true brother or sister. Anyone can imitate a call, but all the organizations have more secretive means of confirming the authenticity of fellow members, and verification is taken seriously. Some members are satisfied by a casual exchange of vital information, such as when and where one was "made" a soror or brother; others, mostly fraternity members, practice a formal and immediate challenging process—including the classified handshake and verbal tests—before they engage in a more relaxed discussion about their brotherhood or sisterhood. The exception is when a newcomer is introduced by a familiar member who can verify that person's authenticity. One respondent explained the sequence of actions he takes when meeting a fraternity brother for the first time: "I can't throw the challenge out in the open because then everyone will know. And if everyone knows, it defeats the purpose. If I make the call, then I can identify with someone else, and then when we're alone, one on one, I can present the challenge and really find out if he's genuine."[46]

## Future Directions

Calls are seen by many outsiders and even some members as insignificant, ridiculous peculiarities that are difficult or embarrassing to explain and are thus best avoided. Yet they are so entrenched in BGLO culture that the national governing bodies of the organizations apply rules of protocol to them, university administrators use them as leverage in negotiating disciplinary action with chapters, and members resort to verbal and physical assault when they are used in violation by others.

As suggested earlier, calls might have been introduced to the BGLO culture during social protests, to communicate actions while masking the identity of group-affiliated efforts. However, calls did not originate with BGLOs. Long before BGLOs were in existence, Africans in Africa and under slavery in the United States used cries and calls to communicate in the fields; each call was unique to the individual and served as an identifier. Others were performed in call-and-response fashion. Despite this long history, the use of calls has not been without controversy. Langston Hughes's and Zora Neale Hurston's com-

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ments on "hollering" among African Americans are exemplary of the ongoing debate among older and younger BGLO members about the appropriateness of fraternity and sorority calls. Yet, despite the controversy—indeed, perhaps because of it—one thing is clear: more research is needed on this important cultural phenomenon.

One possible focus of research on this public ritual could be the period when calls seem to have been adopted. Another suggestion would be to compare the history and use of calls among BGLO members who were initiated at mainstream institutions and those who were initiated at historically black institutions. Given the different social contexts and climates in white versus black college environments, one would expect there to be some important disparities; it will be important for future research to highlight these differences, as well as similarities. It might also be productive to conduct a study to examine regional variations in the calling tradition. A gender study might also be appropriate, since data imply that sororities mimic fraternity behaviors with respect to brands and other aspects of the membership process.

Further research might extend the data collected in this study to examine the mechanisms whereby calls were introduced into BGLO culture. It seems logical that early members were influenced by their involvement with older secret societies or organizations, such as Masonic orders. However, this research has not been done. An interesting source of data would be campus newspapers, which might provide a paper trail that informs earlier discourse or even sheds light on the origins of the tradition. Unfortunately, at the time of this research, a database of student newspapers at historically black colleges and universities had not been compiled for access to back issues.

Without continual inquiry and redefinition, BGLO members run the risk of slowly relinquishing control over determining what their traditions, signs, and symbols mean to them, as well as the images they project to others. As a phenomenon of American culture, BGLOs are always in danger of being assigned definition by others, losing the distinct qualities that make them attractive to desirable prospects, and having their identifying characteristics appropriated by the masses and governed by outside influences.

## Notes

1. The interviewees represented eight of the nine BGLOs (the exception being Iota Phi Theta) and fifteen institutions: Howard University, Livingstone College,

Brown, Tamara L. (Editor); Parks, Gregory S. (Editor); Phillips, Clarenda M. (Editor). African American Fraternities and Sororities : The Legacy and the Vision.
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Tuskegee Institute, Benedict College, Bishop College, Virginia State University, Bluefield State College, Tougaloo College, Wilberforce College, Alabama A&M, Prairie View A&M, Winston-Salem State University, Jackson State University, Spelman College, and Bowie State University. When they are identified by name, one-word pseudonyms are used.

2. Brain Wicker, "Ritual and Culture: Some Dimensions of the Problem Today," in *The Roots of Ritual,* ed. James Shaughnessy (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1973), 13–46.

3. Ronald L. Grimes, "The Lifeblood of Public Ritual: Fiestas and Public Exploration Projects," in *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual,* ed. Victor Turner (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 272.

4. E. B. Brown and G. D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," *Journal of Urban History* 21, no. 3 (1995): 296–346.

5. Ibid., 308–9.

6. Timothy Kelly, "Suburbanization and the Decline of Catholic Public Ritual in Pittsburgh," *Journal of Social History* 28, no. 2 (1994): 311–30.

7. S. L. Del Sesto, "Dancing and Cockfighting at Jay's Lounge and Cockpit: The Preservation of Folk Practices in Cajun Louisiana," in *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture,* ed. Ray Browne (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Press, 1981), 274.

8. Mircea Eliade, *Myth of the Eternal Return,* trans. W. R. Trask (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954), xiv–xv.

9. Margaret Meade, "Ritual and Social Crisis," in *The Roots of Ritual,* ed. James Shaughnessy, 95.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., 89.

12. Ibid., 92.

13. Marcella L. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities and African Communities: Cultural Parallels among Selected Public Rituals" (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 1998), 37.

14. Meade, "Ritual and Social Crisis," 91.

15. Christopher Crocker, "Ritual and Development of Social Structure: Liminality and Inversion," in *The Roots of Ritual,* ed. James Shaughnessy, 49.

16. Edward Fischer, "Ritual as Communication," in *The Roots of Ritual,* ed. James Shaughnessy, 161–62.

17. Meade, "Ritual and Social Crisis," 99.

18. "Akil" (member of Alpha Phi Alpha at Livingstone College, initiated 1965), interview with the author, June 24, 1997.

19. Daniel Kingman, *American Music* (New York: Shirmer Books, 1990), 39.

20. William Barlow, *Looking Up at Down* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 17–18.

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21. Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans,* 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983), 156.

22. Fred Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States,* vol. 2 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1856), 19.

23. Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, USA* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 81–82, quoted in Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 219.

24. Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness,* 219.

25. Lydia Parrish, *Slave Songs of the Georgia Sea Islands* (Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1942), 197, quoted in Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness,* 218.

26. Courlander, *Negro Folk Music,* 81–82.

27. Jon Spencer, *Blues and Evil* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 135.

28. "Neighborhood Improvements," *Chicago Defender,* April 2, 1921, 16.

29. Langston Hughes, "Here to Yonder," *Chicago Defender,* January 15, 1944, 10.

30. Spencer, *Blues and Evil,* 135.

31. Hughes, "Here to Yonder," 10.

32. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 108.

33. "Barbara" (member of Delta Sigma Theta, initiated circa early 1960s), preliminary informal interview with the author, June 1994.

34. Walter M. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2003), 49, 117.

35. Focus group discussion with the author, June 17, 1994.

36. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 64.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. "Helen" (member of Sigma Gamma Rho at Howard University, initiated 1941), interview with the author, June 20, 1996.

40. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 66.

41. "Ariel" (member of Alpha Kappa Alpha at Bowie State University, initiated 1994), interview with the author, June 1, 1996.

42. "Rachel" (member of Sigma Gamma Rho at Howard University, initiated 1993), interview with the author, June 20, 1996.

43. Ibid.

44. "Alan" (member of Phi Beta Sigma at Howard University, initiated 1993), interview with the author, June 20, 1996.

45. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," appendices C and D.

46. "Sean" (member of Omega Psi Phi at Wilberforce College, initiated 1971), interview with the author, June 1, 1996.

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# 11

# Variegated Roots

## The Foundations of Stepping

*Carol D. Branch*

Cars prowl through the parking lot hoping to pounce on the closest open slot. Streams of young women, men, and families head toward the event arena. Along the way, verbal calls float in the air, the final run-through of an unseen team is heard, and the eyes are bombarded with waves of blue, red, black, pink, brown, and purple. The air is filled with a sense of anticipation about the coming hours. It is springtime, and for many black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs), that means one thing: the Long Beach Step Show.

It is an hour before showtime on the campus of California State University, Long Beach. Outside the Pyramid,[1] the local hip-hop station plays the current hits and throws T-shirts to the yelling throng. Meanwhile, the doors, watched by the Fruit of Islam, are opened. As the tickets to one of the biggest step shows in California exchange hands, the DJ skills of Mr. Quick reach out and pull the incoming crowd through the doors.

Once inside, the audience stands in awe of the immenseness of the arena. The entrance level is filled with vendors selling Greek paraphernalia and cultural items. From that level, one goes down through the main audience section. As soon as the crowd enters, it is evident where the Greeks sit. The bottom rows quickly become blocks of undulating color, signifying the various organizations. The men of Alpha Phi Alpha sit next to the women of Alpha Kappa Alpha. The brothers of Phi Beta Sigma are next to their Zeta Phi Beta sisters. The sorors of Delta Sigma Theta seat themselves next to Omega Psi Phi frater-

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*Variegated* is a botany term that means having discrete markings of different colors. Although commonly used to describe leaves, it can also be applied to roots. By using this term in the chapter title, my intent is to convey that stepping has been shaped by a variety of influences, and the contacts and experiences of its practitioners, all of which have left their mark on the phenomenon of stepping.



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nity. The gentlemen of Kappa Alpha Psi sit next to the ladies of Sigma Gamma Rho. And in the midst of these organizations are the brothers of Iota Phi Theta.

On the floor level, two sections of seats face a stage whose blackness is relieved only by the nine colorful banners hanging along its rear. In front of the stage and down the aisles surrounding the floor seats, fraternity and sorority members provide the audience with a glimpse of the hours to come through the party strolls. In the back, a group of Kappas throws one cane in the air while manipulating a second cane on the ground. The audience waits with bated breath to see if the performers will catch the first cane before it hits the ground. As they watch the organizations perform, clusters of people wonder aloud about anticipated feats and relive moments from past shows: "Wonder what the Alphas are going to do?" "How are the Deltas going to top the tambourines?" "Were you here when the Kappas used umbrellas instead of canes?"

Finally, it's showtime. The host is introduced, the black national anthem is sung, and the preshow entertainment moves off the stage. The air fills with BGLO calls and chants as the various teams are announced. During the next five hours, the crowd will be entertained as the organizations compete with one another. However, this show is not just a weekend diversion at the end of a long school year. Rather, the step show is a visual chronicle of the history of blacks, with all its social, cultural, and psychological aspects played out in twelve-minute intervals through the medium of stepping.

Stepping is a community dance form, in that it showcases various aspects of not only black Greek life but also black life. It is evident that the performance of this vernacular dance, generally done in groups, aids in maintaining the social cohesiveness of the BGLOs. By examining the sites where these performances take place and the verbal and physical expressions of the dancers, one finds that stepping contains the history, philosophies, dreams, and rebellions of its practitioners—past and present. It is simultaneously one of the most private and public performance behaviors of BGLOs. Stepping can be found not only on the college yard but also in secret ritual contexts (pertaining to initiation, meetings, and rites of passage) to which the general public is not given access. Even in public demonstrations, the sacred meaning of the performance is not thoroughly understood by non-Greeks.

Stepping is a marriage between the visual and the oral, characterized by precise, synchronized body movements that are stylized and percussive. Frequently coupled with songs, chants, and verbal calls, stepping is a vibrant performance practice that has been shaped by the experiences of blacks, yet it continues to evolve. It is a mixture of Old World and New—the product of a

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variety of African, African American, and American influences that have been melded over the course of decades. Each organization has its own distinct form of stepping that may or may not have a name, yet there are similarities across organizations and genders. Informally, the Alphas and the Omegas term their style of stepping "hopping," the Sigma style is called "clapping," and "caning" is the term used by the Kappas. Many fraternity members use these designations to differentiate their performance style from "pitty-pat," which involves a lot of clapping and is considered feminine.[2]

Owing to the diverse influences and differing organizational lore, beliefs about the origins of stepping vary. Many members of BGLOs agree that stepping has its deepest roots in Africa, and scholarly works focus on the African foundation of stepping; however, there is no agreed-on history, and a number of opinions have been advanced. One view is that stepping was brought to BGLOs by Kwame Nkrumah, a member of Phi Beta Sigma who would later become the president of Ghana. Another view is that soldiers returning from World War II brought with them military marching and cadences that were later turned into steps by BGLO members. Yet another theory is that the gumboot dancers of South Africa influenced the growth of stepping. Still others say that stepping has been influenced by the performance practices of white fraternities and popular culture. Although the history of stepping at certain colleges can be traced, following the history of stepping across the country is nearly impossible. Not all organizations, or chapters of the same organization, were stepping at the same time, nor did all colleges keep public records of BGLO activities. Therefore, to gain a better understanding of the foundations of stepping, it is necessary to examine the works of scholars such as Jacqui Malone and Elizabeth C. Fine, who combine research, fieldwork, and practitioners' personal narratives.[3] This chapter also explores the various layers of influence to obtain a meaningful picture of how stepping has evolved into the performance phenomenon seen today on college campuses, on dance floors, and in music videos.

## African Origins of Stepping

Rhythmically and stylistically, African music is a strong, driving force, and many of the components of African music continue to influence the music making of African Americans. These elements include the use of call and response, polyrhythm, repetition, improvisation and variation, pitch modifica-

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tions or blue notes, and percussion. These components work together to give the music a fullness of sound and the ability to adapt to various situations and to be a mechanism of inclusion within society. Visually, the dances of the various African peoples have also lent their components to the diaspora in the form of dance formations, upper and lower body movements, and body isolation.[4]

Because stepping combines music, song, and dance, one must understand the cultural significance of music and dance to the peoples of Africa in order to examine the African foundations of stepping. There have been numerous accounts of the importance of music and dance in the spiritual and communal lives of African peoples. Kwabena Nketia writes, "In traditional African societies, music making is generally organized as a social event. Public performances, therefore, take place on social occasions; that is, on occasions when members of a group or a community come together for the enjoyment of leisure, for recreational activities, or for the performance of a rite, ceremony, festival, or any kind of collective activity."[5] It is the practice of joining together to make music that maintains the social cohesion within traditional African societies. Making music strengthens a person not only on a collective level but also on a personal one. "Music and dance give the individual his or her precious sense of uniqueness, of worth, of place in the scheme of things, and mediate relationships, teach responsibilities and show opportunities."[6] It is through stepping that the collective and individual features of music making present themselves in BGLOs.

At a marchdown[7] in Los Angeles, a few of the African fraternity members in attendance said that the first thing they noticed about the African American fraternities was the stepping, because it was "reminiscent of home."[8] This familiarity is due in part to the cultural links between Africans and African Americans and the influence of three regions of Africa: West Africa, the Congo, and South Africa.

## WEST AFRICAN DANCE MOVEMENTS

Phi Beta Sigma credits Kwame Nkrumah with introducing a heavy African influence and adding the cane to stepping. One Sigma Web site claims, "he introduced certain steps from his traditional African culture which used dance as a celebration of 'coming of age.'"[9] Whether Nkrumah brought stepping to the fraternities is left to legend, but by performing steps from a rite of passage, Nkrumah is credited with deliberately adding African ritual to stepping. This

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use of stepping to mark the passage of significant moments for black fraternities and sororities is seen in ritual events such as the "Death March," the neophyte march, and the prophyte march.[10] These events are likely to take place at a yard show[11] during social hours, such as Howard University's Friday ritual times and "Black Wednesday" at the University of California–Los Angeles (UCLA).[12] They comprise not only rites of passage but also the element of play, in the form of derisive songs and chants. These gathering hours, in which play and ritual are present, contain parallels to the monthly *avogan* in Benin, in which participants travel from various parts of the city to engage in a form of ritual lampooning of their rivals, with honors going to the most verbally adept participants.[13]

### THE CONGO GAME AND PLAY MOVEMENTS

The Congo serves as one source for the waist, hand, and foot movements found in stepping. Malone quotes Zairean scholar K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau after his first viewing of footage from a step show: "I can't believe this is passing; that this is being done. . . . Who is the trainer of these young people? Because this person could not lead them to do this without going to the Kongo area." Fu-Kiau further comments that "crossing the hands underneath the thighs and above the thighs is typical Kongo play" performed by young girls, called *nsunsa.* Further, the precision hand and arm movements, according to Fu-Kiau, have their foundation in the play of children in Zaire. "*Mbele* literally means 'knife' and it consists of moving the hands in a cuttinglike fashion, similar to fighting."[14] This type of play is married with song. Such manipulation of the body, found throughout West and Central Africa, shows a continuation of an aesthetic of sound and play, and it is through this sense of play that the African American begins to outwardly manifest this inner sense of rhythm.

Having roots in the Congo, juba (or patting juba) is a game utilizing the hands and the body. "The thigh-and-chest slapping dances imparting confidence and self-spirit in Kongo *kamba* evolved in the U.S. into 19th century patting juba, 20th century black-Brazilian *bate coxa* (literally 'slap thigh') dancing, and 20th century hambone in the black United States."[15] The hands are struck, or slapped, and the fingers are snapped in ways that create beat and rhythm. This game has been translated in North America as hambone, in which the hands are slapped against the body in a variety of ways to show the performer's dexterity in creating percussive rhythms. These techniques are further applied to stepping, where stomping of the feet is combined with slap-

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ping of the body with the hands. The slapping of the chest and thighs, as well as the clapping of the hands alone and with other members of the step team, is an extension of juba.

### SOUTH AFRICAN GUM-BOOT DANCERS

Gum-boot dancers were workers in the diamond mines of South Africa. Oppressed by the institution of apartheid, the African miners were overworked, underpaid, and ill-treated. They were forced to work from sunup to sundown, chained to their work stations, and forbidden to speak to one another.[16] Cheap rubber boots, called gum boots, were provided to protect them from the mine runoff. In an effort to communicate, the mine workers created a code by slapping their rubber boots.[17] As this code evolved, it became a tool for entertainment and a method of spoken and unspoken rebellion.[18] Today, this same dance is performed by dance troupes from South Africa as a means of expressing nationhood, tradition, and remembrance.[19] It is also seen in groups such as Step Afrika! which provide a visual reference to the dances of today's African American youth.[20]

Fine notes that the influence of gum-boot dancing, *isicathulo,* could have come as early as the 1930s, when South African dancer Reuben T. Caluza attended Hampton University and later Cornell. She also points out that South African performers were themselves influenced by American films of the 1920s and touring African American dancers and singers who made their presence felt in 1890.[21] According to a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, when BGLO members step, it is a way of honoring their African ancestors who struggled under European domination and yet found a means of expressing their rebellion and spirit: "Steppin' originated in South Africa . . . back in the diamond mines where our ancestors had to work. So what we, and other groups have done, is use it [stepping] to connect back to our African past."[22] In an effort to learn from and share cultural knowledge with their oppressed brothers, members of Alpha Phi Alpha and other BGLOs have journeyed to South Africa.[23] The 1960s was the decade when many African Americans began to learn about the diverse peoples of Africa and to embrace the cultural phenomena of these peoples with whom they shared a cultural or social heritage. Additionally, Malone writes of South African dance troupes touring North America during the 1970s and 1980s, introducing gum-boot dancing and other traditional dance styles to North American urban areas.[24]

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### OTHER AFRICAN INFLUENCES

Stylistically, a variety of components in African American music and dance have been derived from the peoples of Africa. Although some elements were consciously added, such as gum-boot dancing and other traditional dances, many occur due to their culturally relevant aesthetic, such as juba. Added to these are the call and response, polyrhythm, and the circle. These elements reoccurred in African American practices as European practices were tailored and reinterpreted through an African gaze, as described by W. E. B. DuBois: "In each case an attempt has been made to connect present conditions with the Africa past. This is not because Negro Americans are Africans, or can trace an unbroken social history from Africa, but because there is a distinct nexus between Africa and America which, though broken and perverted, is nevertheless not to be neglected."[25]

*Call and Response.* Call and response is a prevalent element in African and African American music, and it occurs when the song leader sings (or performs) a line alone, followed by a repetitive chorus from the rest of the group or the audience. Call and response moves the chant along, as in Omega Psi Phi's "Cadillac." This step was observed at Omega's Sixty-ninth Grand Conclave in Los Angeles. Here, one brother calls, and the group responds:

CALL: A Que!
RESPONSE: Aye! Aye!
CALL: Psi!
RESPONSE: Aye! Aye!
CALL: Phi!
CALL: Some people live.
RESPONSE: What they live for?
CALL: Cadillacs and diamond rings.
CALL: Some people live.
RESPONSE: What they live for?
CALL: Fine cars and fancy things.

It can also bring the audience closer to the performance, as in Phi Beta Sigma's "Sigma Strut" (described later). Sororities use the call and response as well, illustrated by Zeta Phi Beta's chant:

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CALL: I say my sorors.
RESPONSE: Yeah!
CALL: You lookin' good today.
RESPONSE: But then a Zeta lady looks good every day.
EVERYONE: Z-Phi!

When the audience is part of the response, this musical structure is sometimes called "back and forth" by the performers. In stepping, this also occurs on the dance level, when the step master[26] executes a step and the rest of the group repeats the movements.

*Polyrhythm.* Polyrhythm is the combination of two or more contrasting beats used simultaneously in a given composition. This musical aspect is seen in many BGLO steps, especially those in which separate segments of the step team perform a different sequence of movements and thus a different rhythm. Early forms of stepping exhibited a four-beat pattern, but this pattern has moved into the background over the last twenty years. Presently, although the basic four-beat pattern continues to drive the steps and helps keep time, various beats have been inserted to add complexity to the step. These additive beats can be seen and heard in steps such as Alpha's "Syncopation," Omega's "The Red, Black, and the Green," Kappa's "Locomotion," and the "African Step," which is performed by both Zeta Phi Beta and Phi Beta Sigma. During these routines, the various steppers perform a separate rhythm pattern around a central four-beat pattern. These "polyrhythmic structures increase the overall intensity of musical performances because each repetition produces added rhythmic tension."[27]

*The Circle.* Psychologically, one of the most significant African influences is the circle, or ring. The circle is present at most BGLO events—both formal and informal—although there are occasions when the circle is only implied. In public settings, the circle step may be found at the end of "informal exhibitions,"[28] as well as formal public events such as weddings. Fine documents the presence of the circle at Howard University "as the most commonly photographed pattern in the singing and stepping rituals of the 1960's."[29] During the circle step, an organization calls for its members to meet at a specific location to take part in the circle. Members gather in a circle, hold hands, sing a song, and move slightly from side to side. Marcella McCoy discusses how those observing the circle understand that it is not to be broken, and all who wish to

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pass must walk around the circle.[30] The counterclockwise movement in circle steps is also found in Kongo culture, where it symbolizes the "circle of the sun about the earth."[31] This movement, which is observed in both sacred and secular practices, is continued in the ring shouts and juba of early African Americans. It is found in church services, informal social environments, and the play of children in early American history.[32] Indeed, due to is sacred nature, the circle step is rarely taught to those not in the organization, and when it is publicly demonstrated, it is "often performed around a sacred object such as a monument, sundial, or tree."[33]

On the surface, the circle, or ring, is created to afford the audience the opportunity to view the performance clearly. However, there is more to the circle than entertainment. Even though the circle is not always obvious to, or even consciously created by, those present at the event, it is of symbolic importance to the performers and the performance. Both Greek and non-Greek audiences respect the circle and the public ritual it contains. Indeed, the ring is, as Samuel Floyd states, a "symbol of community, solidarity, affirmation, and catharsis."[34] In essence, it is symbolic of a bond among members that cannot and should not be broken.

This circle of community is also found in the stroll. A stroll is an informal type of line dance, performed to music, in which a group forms a line and performs a series of synchronized, stylized moves (steps) while moving forward, often weaving through other dancers and spectators as they go. Each organization has its own stroll, and the fraternities and sororities tend to perform them separately. However, Zeta Phi Beta and Phi Beta Sigma have strolls they can perform together. During the stroll, a line of performers dances around the spectators and other fraternity or sorority lines; each organization does its own stroll, but they all make a circular pattern as they move around the room. When the stroll is performed by a group during a step show, BGLO members execute at least one circle before exiting the performance area.

The largest and most significant circle is created by the audience, which gathers around the performers. If the stage does not allow a full circle, the audience will form a half circle to view the event. At more informal arenas, such as picnics and parties, the Greek observers may join in the ongoing steps. This inclusion of the nonperforming community is especially significant, in that it echoes the circle or round dances found in some African societies, such as the eseni, yango, and adzobo discussed by Nketia[35] and the gahu, a circular dance of Ghana.[36]

Underneath the various performance aspects of stepping is Robert Ferris

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Thompson's concept of the aesthetic of the cool. In Liberia, coolness is the "ability to be nonchalant at the right moment . . . to reveal no emotion in situations where excitement and sentimentality are acceptable—in other words, to act as though one's mind were in another world. It is particularly admirable to do difficult tasks with an air of ease and silent disdain."[37] Through the filter of this concept, being a stepper means not letting others see you at a disadvantage. Because students of color have so many things that are beyond their control, this makes the desire to keep themselves and their emotions in check during the show particularly poignant. It is this aesthetic, this air, that gives good steppers a certain flair while performing, demonstrated through the use of sunglasses during the performance or maintaining an expression of "grit" on their faces.[38] The aesthetic of the cool is found not only in the demeanor of Africans and African Americans but also in their dance. In reference to dance, the aesthetic of the cool helps

> create an appearance of control and idiomatic effortlessness. What vernacular dance celebrates is a "unique combination of spontaneity, improvisation, and control." Yet, while being creative and innovative, the performer is not to lose him/herself in abandonment. The performance should appear unforced and the performer unconcerned with any physical hardships. Stepping is not a matter of "letting it all hang out," but a matter of proceeding in terms of "a very specific technology of stylization." A loss of control and a loss of coolness places one *squarely* outside of the tradition.[39]

Many of the step teams move with an air of nonchalance while on stage, what many scholars call a "strut." While performing, audience members may yell "Be out" to the steppers. This is an exhortation for the steppers to give the performance everything they have, while staying cool. Although the steppers are to dance with enthusiasm, the performers dare not miss a cue, drop a prop, or stumble, lest they risk ridicule.

Just as music and dance play an important role in African cultures, they also figure prominently in African American culture. In *Music of the Common Tongue,* Christopher Small writes, "throughout the years of slavery, the practice of making music and dancing never died among the black people in America." Rather, he states, these behaviors served as "a ritual for survival in those horrible times, and the slaves could for the duration of the dance feel themselves fully realized as individuals and as members of a community."[40]

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Thus, music continued to be a vehicle of empowerment, a means through which the slaves were able to maintain a sense of self, even while being separated from those things and people that were familiar.

*The Drum.* Enslaved Africans adapted many traditional cultural practices to their new environment. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the use of the drum and social dancing. In West African societies, the drum was a major means of communication in both secular and sacred settings. It was used to send messages across long distances, in celebrations, and in worship. "When the drums were silent, the old gods came no more."[41] The drum, with its bass, percussive sound and ability to communicate, played a major role in shaping the practice of stepping in BGLOs. Indeed, the drum was at the heart of stepping. Reginald Love III, a member of Alpha Phi Alpha, states: "They [Africans] marched to the beat of the drum. They danced to the beat of the drum. The drum was the symbolization of the heartbeat. The drum symbolizes the spirit, the African spirit of the drumbeat, and all our dance, all our music, has that rhythm of the drum." When speaking of the drum in terms of its importance to African American society and the individual, Love states, "The drum is our metronome, our metronome for life. It's how you progress. One step at a time."[42]

Historically, slave owners in the United States understood the revolutionary aspect of the drum and its centrality in the lives of Africans. As a result of this understanding, and for fear of a concentrated revolt by slaves, use of the drum was banned. Lewis Paine, in his 1851 work, writes about the southern laws that forbade the "using and keeping of drums, horns or other loud instruments which may call together or give sign or notice to one another."[43] As a result of this suppression, the drum was obliged to relocate; rather than disappear, the body became the site of the drum. According to Gerhard Kubik:

> In a time of slavery and oppression specific cultural traits may be forced to disappear among their carriers. They do not really disappear. They only retreat to a safer area of the human psyche. For example, if you prosecute drumming in an African community and even burn all the drums of the people, what will happen? The drums will perhaps really disappear and the drum patterns will not be used again, but they will still remain—in a silent shape. The drum patterns will just retreat into the body of the people. This has nothing to do with genetics, because the transmission is cultural, through human interaction. The drum patterns will be transformed into a set of *motional behavior;* they will go back to their source. In this form

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> they will continue to be transmitted from mothers and grandmothers to their children, from father and son during work, non-verbally, as an awareness of a style of moving. When a favorable moment in history comes, the drum patterns surface again, perhaps on some other instruments. Some young people suddenly "invent" something new.[44]

Slaves placed the percussive sound of the drum into their hands, feet, thighs, and chests. This "new" instrument allowed Africans in America to celebrate, socialize, and worship without fear or retribution. It was during this time of oppression that there was an upsurge in what are now called children's games, such as hambone and the juba-derived hand patting games. These games continued to teach new generations about the importance of internal rhythm and the percussive beat. Although this hidden drum was found in the secular community, it was also present in the church, as evidenced by the stomping of the feet and the clapping of the hands. Thus, it is not surprising to see this continuation of the body as an instrument in BGLOs. "The body is the drum, and you step to the beat of the drum, and that's your natural beat."[45]

*Dances of Pageantry and Ridicule.* While the body continued to provide enslaved Africans with a source of rhythm, the social dances of early Africans perpetuated the tradition of mocking those possessing a higher social status and showing the performer's ability to control his or her body while executing complicated movements. Because fraternity and sorority performance behaviors are a mixture of the verbal and the visual, it is important to look at the influence dance has had on the phenomenon of stepping. The ritual challenge and the elements of control are contained in the cakewalk, a stylized dance performed as a means of entertainment, competition, and subtle rebellion. McCoy writes of stepping that its "informal exhibition can be linked, mostly by its pageantry, to the Cake-Walk or the Chalk-Line Walk. This dance evolved from a mid 19th century plantation pastime, to being popularized in turn of the century African American productions. . . . The Cake-Walk originally was a kind of shuffling dance that evolved into a smooth walking step with the body held erect . . . the movement became a prancing strut."[46] The cakewalk is one of the earliest U.S. cornerstones of stepping, not only in terms of its prancing gait but also in terms of the idea of a ritual challenge, where performers compete to see who has the most control, the most "coolness."

The John Kunering ceremony, also known as John Canoeing, showcased an intricate form of the cakewalk. This event occurred during the Christmas

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holidays as a means of celebration and originated in West Africa and the Kuner people. During the John Kunering ceremony, "costumed performers were led by a heavily disguised leader known as the 'ragman.'" The dancers executed a variety of body-contorting movements, including kicks and various gyrations, while a second leader sang in tandem with the performance.[47] Just as today's steppers are costumed and led by a step master, so too were early Africans in the United States. Thus, from early celebrations to today's Greek events, there is a continued sense of pageantry, challenge, community, and ritual in music making and in stepping.

## U.S. Influences on Stepping

Although African traditions and early adaptations of African movements lay the foundation of stepping history, the United States has lent its own influence to the performance through military cadences and marches, the songs of white fraternities, black music forms, and a variety of pop cultural inspirations. The shared aspect of stepping is further displayed through the inclusion of these phenomena. Through marching, organizations exhibit public solidarity; the use of music and pop culture shows that sororities and fraternities exist in the larger framework of U.S. culture and that stepping is an outward symbol of this inclusion.

### THE MILITARY

The military has played a large part in the formation and continuation of BGLO chants and steps. One might even say that the performance behaviors of both the military and BGLOs exist in a type of symbiotic relationship. Blacks have enlisted and continue to enlist in the armed forces. The military has always been a place where those without money or opportunity can provide support for their families and distinguish themselves. As a result of blacks entering the military before, during, and after attending college, one finds BGLO behavior in the military and military behavior in the BGLO system.

The brothers of Omega Psi Phi, with their paramilitary garb, trace stepping back to the military influence of the early 1900s. Ex-soldiers attending college would incorporate marches and drills into their BGLO performance behaviors. During the grand conclave in 1996, a group of Omega men were interviewed regarding the early influence of the military on stepping. "A lot of

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the brothers who helped found this organization were members of the military ROTC programs back in college. . . . If you ever see a line marching down pledges, they march like a military line that you might see when . . . marines do their drills. It's the same with a pledge line or brothers when we step."[48]

Shannon Rawls of Kappa Alpha Psi elaborated: "Members of black organizations, brothers of Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi . . . that went to the military for World War II in the late '30s and early '40s would come back home and incorporate some of the same cadence and military style back into . . . the stepping style, or to the dancing style that they did."[49]

Stepping during this early period was called lining, descriptive of the formation in which soldiers march. Some Omegas and other BGLO members still refer to stepping as marching on account of this early military influence.

This military behavior is further observed in the clothing, stance, and marching of BGLO members. Part of the basic working military wardrobe consists of camouflage pants, or fatigues, and combat boots. These garments, though found at all fraternities, are especially prevalent among the brothers of Omega Psi Phi. The Omegas wear this attire as a means of paying homage to blacks who were on the front lines during military conflicts. Over the last decade, the wearing of fatigues by sororities has become popular, especially among the members of Delta Sigma Theta. By adopting this military look, the sorors convey that they are every bit as capable of "real" stepping as the fraternity brothers.

The positions of "attention" and "at ease" are often found in BGLO step performances. When at attention, the steppers face forward with their feet placed together, their eyes directed slightly over the crowd, and their arms either at their sides or parallel to the earth with both fists meeting in the middle of the chest. When given the call for at ease, the performers spread their feet shoulder length apart, clasp their hands behind their backs, and turn their heads first to the side, then forward to face the crowd. Between the various segments of the performance, the steppers stand at attention or at ease as a method of showing readiness. The precision marching of the military is also found in steps such as Alpha Phi Alpha's "Parade," in which the steppers form a tight group and, using cadence, execute sharp turns and coordinated hand and arm movements that are paired with the calls of the step master. Alpha brother Reginald Love III states, "When we step, it's got a cadence to it. I learned that being in the military; a lot of [fraternity] cadence is military related."[50]

Versions of the chants found in BGLOs are also found in military jodies, commonly known as cadences.[51] It is unclear which came first, but this dual

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presence suggests a close relationship between the two organizations. For example, chants such as Alpha's "Saint Peter" exist in both places with only minor changes. The military's version of "Saint Peter" is as follows:

> When I get to heaven [repeat]
> St. Peter's gonna say,
> How'd you get to heaven,
> How'd you earn your way?
> And I'll reply,
> With a little bit of anger,
> I made my way blood, guts, sweat, and danger.
> I live my life as an airborne ranger.

The Alpha version of the chant is identical except for the omission of the last line.[52]

Attention to teamwork, precision, and footwork is also evident in the black drill team. Before entering the military or the university, many young adults have already experienced the drill team, which has a long history in the African American community, borrowing from the practices of nineteenth-century minstrelsy and black mutual aid and benevolent societies.[53] Indeed, both these stages set the tone for the comedy and pageantry of stepping. The burlesque stage showcased the slave practice of "lampooning white military practices," an event known as "Training Day."[54] The mutual aid and benevolent societies provided a model of pageantry and showmanship with their parades and drill team competitions, which included both male and female participants.[55] The modern-day drill team usually consists of young girls who perform precision marches combined with popular dance and arm movements. A drum squad containing a big bass drum and a snare often accompanies the unit. Although young men generally join the drum squad rather than the drill team, they are acquainted with the rhythms, arm movements, and footwork of the latter. A common occurrence is for fraternity and sorority members returning to their hometowns to mentor or lead school or church drill teams. These new leaders are not only teaching the familiar moves they learned as children but also incorporating the step movements acquired at the university.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The evolution of stepping has not occurred without contact with other ethnic and cultural groups. Although stepping is an art form that has grown

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out of the black Greek experience, its early singing form may have been borrowed from, or influenced by, white fraternities. White fraternities' practice of serenading—gathering to sing fraternity songs either amongst themselves or to their sweethearts—was adopted by BGLOs and transformed by the black aesthetic[56] and by black experiences in the military and in a changing modern era. Kappa Alpha Psi member Shannon Rawls discusses the phenomenon of stepping as a mixture of different influences that were partially determined by time and environment:

> White organizations were serenading or crooning. They would stand in line and sing their songs or their creed. Black organizations took it a step forward and included dancing. It was not the traditional dancing. It was a movement of the body that the black fraternities did. Originally it was said that the [white] fraternities men would do it [sing] to get girls. If they sounded good . . . they were the hot guys on campus. The black organizations would sing and dance. If they were the best looking, the same results happened. . . . The NPHC [National Pan-Hellenic Council] was formed in 1930. I believe it was at the third international meeting, to pass the time between sessions, they would begin the stepping. That is when . . . the sororities got involved in the stepping. Then came the '50s and the '60s, when [doo-wop] groups like the Temptations and the Chi-Lites would sing on the streets. That's where . . . it got really organized, in the late '60s and early '70s.[57]

A cappella and doo-wop singing groups of the 1950s and 1960s stand at the forefront of the popular cultural influences on stepping. "What most young steppers don't know is that stepping used to have more singing than body percussion. One of the earliest steps of my chapter is a doo-wop style tune with matching choreography that only includes snapping and foot movements. We call it 'Oh-A.'"[58] Besides singing, these groups added choreographed hand movements and footwork to their performances, and these additions were absorbed by the fraternities and sororities during the 1970s.

In addition to a full complement of dance movements, the verbal dexterity in stepping is well rounded. Although it is easy for those unfamiliar with stepping to focus solely on the dance movements, the oral component is an essential aspect. Oral influences begin with the African tradition of the griot, the singer of history; continue with the black preacher; and are reshaped and developed through children's play, the toast, street talk, and rap. Through the

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latter forms of oral tradition, fraternities are able to show their love for one another, their organizations, and their community.

The griot and the black preacher have served similar functions in their respective communities, that of oral historian. The griot (or jali) of West Africa was both the keeper of history and an entertainer. Performing at functions, the griot was able to recount family lineages and recall significant deeds of the region. Likewise, the black preacher keeps the history of the various families in his or her congregation and can speak on past events that affected the black community. The preacher continues to be the purveyor of community mores.

Children's oral play has contributed to the performance repertoire of BGLOs in the form of nursery rhymes. In the case of the chants used at parties, nursery rhymes are turned upside down and given a risqué touch. Omega Psi Phi has done this with "Old Mother Hubbard." By subverting the role of the maternal figure, the Omegas transform a rhyme dealing with the plight of hunger into an illicit parody:

Old Mother Hubbard
She went to her cupboard
To get her Q-Dawg a bone.
All right, all right, all right!
But when she bent over,
Rover took over,
And gave her a bone of his own.

Jokes and toasts offer some insight into the themes of the songs and chants of black fraternities. Langston Hughes states that "in the category of the bawdy joke there are hundreds illustrating the prevalent folk belief in the amorous prowess of the Negro male."[59] Along with other street language, jokes continue to mock the mainstream's preconceptions of the oversexed black male. Toasts also explore the myth of the sexual black male, a stereotype that characterizes him as sexually overendowed and possessing a rampant sexual appetite. Black folkloric figures such as Shine and Staggerlee are prime examples of this stereotype, in that they are known as much for their sexual exploits as for their bad attitudes.[60]

The overt sexuality found in the braggadocio of jokes and toasts is continued in the party chants and steps of black fraternities. This exaggeration of the sexual abilities of the performers raises the "street" stature of the indi-

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vidual, and thus the organization. These behaviors stay firmly in the aesthetic of these oral phenomena by exploiting the idea of the overendowed, extremely sexual black male. This is illustrated by the existence of chants such as the following:

> This leg,
> Well, it's my hurt leg.
> This leg,
> Well, it's all right.
> Chorus: all right, all right, all right.
> This leg points to the window.
> This leg points to the wall.
> Chorus: the wall, the wall, the wall.
> This leg, [gesturing to the penis]
> Well, it's my third leg.
> And it races down the hall.
> Chorus: the hall, the hall, the hall.

This step was performed by members of Alpha Phi Alpha at a 1996 yard show at UCLA. At the end of the performance, the audience laughed and whooped at the antics of the entertainers, understanding that the step routine was a satire of the long-lived stereotype of black men.

Sororities rarely perform routines drawing on a hypersexual stereotype. Kirsten Smith, artistic director of Step Afrika!, states that when she attended college in the 1980s:

> Sexually explicit themes were only carried out by the men and were only done at the Block Show where very few elders attended. This was a picnic thrown by the students for the students. Sexually explicit themes were never meant to be performed at the Step Show during homecoming where families attended. I have never heard of sexually explicit themes done by women at the graduate level. To brazenly spew sexually explicit themes in the name of any public service sorority or fraternity, is the ULTIMATE form of disrespect . . . to our elders and to our respective organizations.[61]

Rather than draw on overt sexual imagery, sororities such as Sigma Gamma Rho and Alpha Kappa Alpha brag about their members' ability to "take" any woman's man and to be the object of all men's desires.[62] This uplifts the repu-

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tation of the sorority members among their peers without causing them to lose the respect of their elders.

### POPULAR CULTURE

Music, in both its sacred and secular forms, plays a large part in the performance practices of fraternities. The verbal and rhythmic influences of black music are evident not only in the songs and chants but also in the very beat of the performance. In the sacred realm, it is easy to find evidence of black spirituals in the pledge songs and chants of these organizations, which are often linked to the step performance. Chants, such as "I've Got a Feeling," are sung to the tunes of early spirituals and gospel songs.

Omega Psi Phi's "Zoom"[63] displays an obvious spiritual influence through its allusion to the river Jordan, which must be crossed to get to heaven. At various public events, BGLOs open their routines with spiritual-style songs praising their organizations.

When I die,
And leave this old earth.
I know there's a place for me.
It's way up there,
In that light shining bright.
That no man but Omega can see.

Sororities, such as Delta Sigma Theta, utilize spiritual imagery to show that membership in their organizations sets one apart:

When you get to Heaven
And you can't get in
You just show St. Peter your Delta pin.[64]

Secular music also leaves its mark on BGLOs' songs, chants, and steps. The syncopated rhythms of jazz are found throughout the music of the black fraternities. One example is the "Sigma Strut," which combines the braggadocio of the toast with the smooth rhythm of jazz and jive talking. This song begins with the performers asking the audience to snap their fingers in a 4/4 beat and to call out "a boom, boom" on the fourth beat. The sound produced is similar to that of the high hat on a drum set. During the performance of this song,

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each individual member takes the spotlight and recites a four-line verse introducing himself and then elevating himself in the eyes of the audience.

Chorus:
A boom, boom [the audience repeats this part]
Goddamn the Sigmas are here
A boom, boom
We came to make this perfectly clear
A boom, boom
It only takes a few of us
A boom, boom
To do the bad-ass Sigma strut
A boom, boom

My name is Quiet Storm
A boom, boom
I love to keep you ladies warm
A boom, boom
Even though I don't talk much
A boom, boom
I love to bust . . . What? [said by the Sigma team]
A fat ass nut

Chorus

My name is Caramel
A boom, boom
I love to give the ladies a thrill
A boom, boom
When it comes to freakin' time
A boom, boom
Damn right I'm a work my behind [hands on knees while thrusting pelvis in a circular motion]

Chorus

My name is Megadeath
A boom, boom
I lick it low on the first request
A boom, boom

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Even though I'm the tail of the line
A boom, boom
Don't trip, I'll still tap that behind [holding left hand stiff while hitting it with the right]

Chorus

Further evidence of a secular influence is the recreation of popular music in the steps of the fraternities. The brothers of Phi Beta Sigma take popular music, such as rap, and combine it with the driving bass provided by stepping. One example of this is LL Cool J's "Rock the Bells." Toward the end of the opening verse, the performers changed the words of the last line to reflect their affiliation: "Phi Beta Sigma came here to rock the bells." This twisting of popular songs is present in sororities as well, such as in Alpha Kappa Alpha's "Hey There Ivy Girl," which parodies "Hey There Lonely Girl," and in the use of the Temptations' lyrics, "we're doing fine on the ivy line."[65]

More recent popular black dances have also affected stepping. Some of the dances incorporated by the fraternities are the wop, the bounce, and the gator. The Alphas use the wop in their step routine "Ice, Ice, Baby." In fact, this dance is used whenever the performers want to give the routine an "old school" feel. The concept of "old school" differs, depending on the age of the person using the phrase; generally it refers to those people or things that have influenced the individual's behavior. Commonly, "old school" refers to activities, music forms, and artists of the 1960s. In the case of the 1996 Alpha step team, however, "old school" refers not only to the innovators and creations of the 1960s but also to the 1980s wop.

BGLOs have also adopted the gator (also called the worm) and the posturing of hip-hop. The gator is executed by jumping in the air, but instead of landing on the feet, the dancer turns his body downward so that his hands are the first to touch the ground. The body is then lowered in a controlled flop to simulate, supposedly, an alligator flopping in and out of the water. Performing this dance shows the crowd that the performer is "out" and firmly in the aesthetic of the cool. Although hip-hop posturing is not a dance, it is part of the music event. Through this posturing, which includes strutting across the stage, the performers assume a stance of aggressive masculinity or female self-determination. This posturing contributes to the sense of coolness. This strut can also be called the Gangsta Limp, which is really the Pimp Walk of the 1960s, and 1970s.[66]

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Another dance form that has found a home in stepping is poplocking. Poplocking, innovated by Don Campbell in the early 1970s, is characterized by kicking the legs and waving the arms.[67] Although the dance contains a series of jerking movements, it relies on the performer's steady control to give it a smooth flow. This dance also includes squatting and slapping the ground, performed by steppers when they want to charge up the audience.

The popular mass media have left their mark on certain elements of the performance as well. By using mass culture icons, black fraternities show that although they are distinct, they are also a part of society as a whole. Popular television shows and films have influenced the clothing and content of step shows in the form of Star Trek uniforms, Mortal Combat martial arts movements, Matrix-type trenchcoats and body contortions, and nightly news skits. Movies have also impacted the music choices used in stepping. "Once the late 1970s/1980s style of stepping became the style, [that is,] became the norm, there became a need for an 'intro' and 'outro.' Most of these were heavily influenced by the video era and continue to be so."[68] During 1997's Califest, held at the University of Southern California, the Sigma step team entered the stage to the theme of *Car Wash*, a 1976 movie. Accompanied by rhythm and blues group Rose Royce, the performers stepped across the stage in blue coveralls, black boots, and plastic hair caps. Well-known legends have also made their mark; for example, the legend of King Arthur pulling his sword from the stone is recreated by a lone Kappa Alpha Psi stepper pulling his cane from the stone.

Many of the influences that have enriched stepping are detailed in Jacqui Malone's work *Steppin' on the Blues,* where she discusses the history of stepping at Howard University. Howard was and continues to be the site where many of the performance activities of BGLOs occur. From the jazz dancing of the 1920s and the jitterbugging of the 1930s to current-day step shows, it is clear that social and ritual dancing has occurred in the black Greek community for many years. From these early events, "song and dance rituals were made an official part of the pledging program . . . [and] 'probate shows' developed." At the end of probate, "each pledge group, or 'line,' was required to perform publicly."[69]

Stepping came to mainstream attention with Spike Lee's 1988 movie *School Daze* and to global attention when it was performed at the 1996 Olympic Games' opening pageant. Currently, stepping is seen not only at organized step shows but also in music videos, at the theater, and in exercise videos. It is both global and multicultural, as more ethnic groups take the performance behavior and adapt it to their cultural and communal needs. Although much of its history is

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unwritten, stepping is traceable through an analysis of the myriad peoples and influences that have impacted its development. It is this ability to adapt and transform that will allow the future of stepping to be just as varied and colorful as its past has been.

## Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA. This support included funding for the videotaping of performance events in California and Arizona and for the interviewing of BGLO members from July 1996 through October 2000.

## Notes

1. The Pyramid (so named because of its shape) is the sports venue on the campus of California State University, Long Beach.

2. E-mail communication with Kirsten Smith, artistic director of Step Afrika! and a member of Delta Sigma Theta, May 2003.

3. Jacqui Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues: The Visible Rhythms of African American Dance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Elizabeth C. Fine, *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 118.

4. J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974); Portia Maultsby, "Africanisms in African American Music," in *Africanisms in African American Culture*, ed. Joseph E. Halloway (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue* (London: Calder, 1987); Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983).

5. Nketia, *Music of Africa*, 21.

6. Small, *Music of the Common Tongue*, 29.

7. A marchdown is an intrafraternity competition in which regional champions compete to determine the best stepping chapter in the organization. The marchdown is usually part of the entertainment of a national conference or conclave.

8. Field notes from Omega Psi Phi's Sixty-ninth Grand Conclave, Los Angeles, CA.

9. Phi Beta Sigma, "History of Stepping," May 30, 2000, at http://www.inetport.com/~sean/pbs.html.

10. The "Death March" is a rite of passage near the end of the pledging process. According to Reginald Love III of Alpha Phi Alpha, "The Death March symbolizes the period where you go into probate, you're in a different phase of your pledge process. You're progressing more towards becoming a brother. You only have a few weeks, final

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weeks left in your pledge process." A neophyte is a new member of a BGLO. One is technically a neophyte until the next pledge class is initiated, or for one year. A prophyte is an older member of a fraternity or sorority.

11. The yard show, also called a block party, is one of the more frequently organized events and is relatively informal. Organizations utilize this event to attract the interest of future members, mark important occasions in the fraternities and in the African American community, and perform various rites of passage. The yard show generally takes place at a central campus location.

12. According to Jacqui Malone, in *Steppin' on the Blues,* between the hours of 12:00 and 1:30 P.M., fraternity and sorority members gather in the upper quadrangle of Howard University, "the Yard," and perform. A similar event, called "Black Wednesday," occurs at the center of the UCLA campus, known as Bruin Walk, from 12:00 to 1:00 P.M. on Wednesdays. These are not merely social hours but also arenas for black Greek ritual activities.

13. Fine, *Soulstepping,* 77.

14. Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 190.

15. Robert Ferris Thompson, *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 56.

16. University of Nebraska, "Scarlet Arts," May 27, 2003, at http://www.unl.edu/scarlet/v10n33/v10n33arts.html.

17. Field notes from Step Afrika! clinic held at the First National Conference on Stepping at Virginia Tech, 2001.

18. Carol Muller and Janet Topp Fargion, "Gumboots, Bhaca Migrants, and Fred Astaire: South African Worker Dance and Musical Style," *African Music* 7, no. 4 (1999): 88–109.

19. Ibid., 106, 107.

20. Step Afrika! is a dance ensemble based in Washington, D.C. It melds the traditions of stepping; tap; South African dances, including Zulu and gum boot; and modern, hip-hop, house, and freestyle dancing. Further information can be obtained from the Step Afrika! Web site: http://www.stepafrika.org.

21. Fine, *Soulstepping,* 78, 92.

22. Field video of UCLA yard show, 1997.

23. Fine, *Soulstepping,* 117–19.

24. Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 247.

25. W. E. B. DuBois, *The Negro Family* (1908; reprint, New York: New American Library, 1969), 9.

26. Also known as the call dog or hob master, the step master is usually the individual who teaches steps to other performers, puts together step show routines, and begins steps during performances.

27. Maultsby, "Africanisms in African Music," 193.

28. Maracella Lynn McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities and

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African Communities: Cultural Parallels among Selected Public Rituals" (PhD diss., Bowling Green State University, 1998), 85.

29. Fine, *Soulstepping,* 18.

30. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 82.

31. Fine, *Soulstepping,* 81.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., 148.

34. Samuel A. Floyd, *The Power of Black Music: Interpreting the History from Africa to the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 21.

35. Nketia, *Music of Africa,* 213, 225, 228.

36. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 86.

37. Thompson, *Face of the Gods,* 41.

38. Fine (*Soulstepping,* 40) describes grit as "a characteristic expression displayed by pledges—a stern face with an out-thrust lower lip." Any stepper can don this expression to show that he or she is serious about the performance.

39. Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 34.

40. Small, *Music of the Common Tongue,* 97.

41. John S. Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), 39.

42. Reginald Love III, interview with the author, 2000.

43. Lewis L. Paine, *Six Years in a Georgia Prison* (New York: n.p., 1851), 127; Southern, *Music of Black America,* 182.

44. Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games and Dances of Brazil : A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas* (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979), 49–50.

45. Love interview.

46. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 89.

47. Hayward Farrar, "The African Roots of Stepping" (paper presented at the Fifth Congress of the Americas, Puebla, Mexico, October 18–20, 2001), 4, available at http://www.ipsonet.org/congress/5/papers.html.

48. Four members of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc., interview with the author, 1996.

49. Shannon Rawls, interview with the author, 2000.

50. Love interview.

51. Military jodies, or cadences, are rhythmic sequences of lines containing the element of call and response; they are usually performed while marching or running as a means of motivation.

52. Love interview.

53. Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 186.

54. Fine, *Soulstepping,* 57.

55. Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 185–86; Fine, *Soulstepping,* 57.

56. The black aesthetic may be seen in terms of Davis's concept of aesthetic com-

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munity (Gerald L. Davis, *I Got the Word in Me and I Can Sing It, You Know: A Study of the Performed African-American Sermon* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985], 30–31). This community consists of "a group of people sharing a knowledge for the development and maintenance of a particular affecting mode of 'craft' and the articulating principles to which the affecting mode must adhere or oppose" (Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 193).

57. Rawls interview.

58. Smith e-mail.

59. Langston Hughes, "Jokes Black People Tell Themselves," in *Mother Wit from the Laughing Barrel,* ed. Alan Dundes (Jackson: University of Mississippi, 1990), 641.

60. Shine is a figure in African American folk tales who is known as the "bad man." His exploits depict him as overindulging in wine and women. Staggerlee, also known as Stackolee, is another "bad man" figure in African American folk tales. He is characterized not only by his use of violence but also by his rampant sexual appetite.

61. Smith e-mail.

62. An example is this Alpha Kappa Alpha routine, courtesy of Tasha McAllister:

They don't want Zeta Phi Beta
And they don't want Sigma Gamma Rho
And they all had some D.S.T.
But what a real man wants is some pink and green
Skee Wee!!

63. This version of "Zoom" was recorded in 1996:

Down by the river, who-o-o-oa
There's no place I'd rather go
I can hear Omega ringing in my ear
It says Omega, Omega, Omega

64. McCoy, "African American Fraternities and Sororities," 84.

65. Ibid., 79.

66. Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994), 25.

67. Don "Campbellock" Campbell is the former *Soultrain* dancer and stripper who sparked the dance craze of locking in the 1970s, paving the way for break dancing. R. J. Smith, "Lock, Pop, and Quarrel," *Vibe* (September 1998): 267–68.

68. Smith e-mail. An "intro" and an "outro" are performance skits that are distinct from the main step performance. The intro is used to set the mood and give the audience a glimpse of the theme of the step routine. Some of the intros performers have used feature them as secret agents, ninjas, time travelers, and newscasters. The outro signals the end of the performance and usually involves some type of stroll performed to music as the steppers exit the stage.

69. Malone, *Steppin' on the Blues,* 204.

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# 12

## Sisterly Bonds

### African American Sororities Rising to Overcome Obstacles

*Clarenda M. Phillips*

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
—Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise"

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, African American female college students created their own sororities to survive and thrive in institutions of higher education and the greater U.S. society. Although African American sororities came into existence after white fraternities and sororities and after African American fraternities, to view their formation as a reaction to the existence of these other exclusionary organizations is simplistic and erroneous. Rather, African American sororities emerged out of their members' desire to have organizations that could effectively meet their needs and advance their agendas.

African American women's experiences in the United States led them to create college-based organizations that built on their past traditions of self-help, racial solidarity, and racial uplift. In a society where whites and men came first, African American women decided that only they could act in their own best interest. With their growing presence at historically black colleges and universities and predominantly white institutions, the natural course for African American women was to develop organizations where they learned and lived to bring about change in a racially hostile nation. Although racism and sexism were long-standing U.S. institutions, African American sororities set



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out to bolster the success of African American college women and help the African American community in general through their political activities and various community service programs. As Patricia Hill Collins notes, African American women's "strategies of everyday resistance have largely consisted of trying to create spheres of influence, authority, and power within institutions that traditionally have allowed African Americans and women little formal authority or real power."[1] Even a casual examination of the social conditions of African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries indicates the need for African American sororities to create spheres of influence within higher education.

## Institutional Racism: The Impetus for African American Sororities

Although the Civil War had been fought and the slaves freed, the social conditions of African Americans were slow to change. As African Americans created their own institutions, their progress and upward mobility threatened whites. With Reconstruction over and southern whites feeling hopeful about regaining complete power, whites sought to reestablish their racial privilege and status by instituting a series of legal and extralegal practices and policies to stymie the full and equal participation of African Americans in society. The most systematic web of discrimination ever created, Jim Crow, began to reign with de jure segregation in the South and de facto segregation in the North. Whites passed hundreds of laws, constitutional amendments, and city ordinances that legalized discrimination against African Americans and other ethnic groups. This set of discriminatory legal actions gave birth to a separate caste for African Americans that denied them their basic human rights. Whites thoroughly limited blacks' access to education, health care, housing, public transportation, and other public facilities, and legalized separate, inferior public facilities.

Obviously, Jim Crow was not sufficient, because whites turned to other oppressive tactics to subordinate African Americans. In an effort to instill fear, whites refined the art of lynching to prevent African Americans from challenging racist practices. Occasionally assisted by local police officials, white mobs lynched more than 6,000 African American men and women between 1882 and 1921.[2] Whites often manufactured charges of black men raping white women and selected upwardly mobile African Americans to lynch in order to assert white superiority and dominance, and to send a clear message to other African Americans.

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Furthermore, whites designed the debt peonage system of sharecropping in the South. African Americans, desiring to provide for their families and establish their independence after slavery, refused to work for slave wages on white-owned plantations. Instead, they entered into tenant farming agreements whereby landowners provided them with seed and farming supplies in return for a portion of the crop. However, white landowners exploited African Americans by setting extremely high interest rates, controlling local stores, and running the crop markets, which kept African Americans in a cycle of ever-increasing debt. White landowners also passed sharecropping laws that mandated that tenant farmers remain on the land until they had paid off all their debts. Well into the 1900s, sharecropping was the primary way of life for many skilled African American farmers in the South because of racism.

Late in the nineteenth century, many whites looked to science to justify segregation and racism. Scientists asserted that the Negro race was underdeveloped and inferior to the other races. Books by white men such as Arthur de Gobineau[3] and Charles Darwin[4] were used to support the genetic intellectual superiority of whites and the genetic inferiority of "lower" races. Moreover, psychologists developed and used IQ tests to assert that African Americans were, on average, less intelligent than whites. Much of this "scientific" research was fabricated and distorted to support claims of white racial superiority. Added to this scientific racism was whites' insistence that African American women were immoral and lacked the virtuous characteristics of white women.

In spite of racism, by 1900, an estimated 2,500 African Americans had graduated from college.[5] As blacks became educationally equipped for economic advancement, racial discrimination in the North and South prevented them from enjoying the fruits of their labor. The white-established color line relegated the majority of African Americans to agricultural work and domestic and personal service occupations. As a result, two classes of African Americans evolved. One contained the majority of African Americans who were entrenched in poverty and struggling to survive. The other contained a small, educated group of African American elites who were teachers, preachers, doctors, and lawyers. However, racism provided a common enemy that united the two classes despite their economic differences. Moreover, with segregation as the rule, both groups of African Americans needed the goods and services provided by the other. In mutual aid, African Americans thus combined their resources and created their own social service agencies, including schools, hospitals, and orphanages.

Families from both classes started sending their daughters to college in

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greater numbers in the twentieth century. These daughters brought with them the hopes and dreams of their families, their desire to succeed, and their passion to improve the lives of African Americans who could not attend college. Their desire to uplift the race was not unusual among African Americans. As Collins notes, African American women were the primary adopters of the racial uplift philosophy.[6] These daughters created African American sororities for themselves and others by relying on well-established cultural norms.

## African American Cultural Traditions

When African American women joined an African American sorority, they viewed themselves as becoming part of an extended family. The bond of sisterhood in an African American sorority went much deeper than mere membership in an organization, because the image of family on which these sororities were established drew heavily from the traditional African notions of family and family formation.[7] Traditionally, African families were organized by blood relations determined by same-sex adult siblings or by larger same-sex groups from the father's or mother's bloodline.[8] This extended-family arrangement existed among coresidents in a set of dwellings known as a compound. After marriage, Africans did not move away from their families to set up isolated households but stayed in the compound of the bride's or groom's extended family.[9] Therefore, the stability of the African family was based on the large number of blood-related members and not on the legal bond between conjugal pairs. Both men and women depended on their extended family networks for their livelihood.

Most of the enslaved Africans who came to America during the slave trade came without any members of their extended families. However, they did bring with them their learned family societal codes, including respect, responsibility, and reciprocity.[10] As a result, the relationships that Africans created in America embodied their own backgrounds and the conditions in which they found themselves. The institution of the African extended family, which functioned in Africa as units of production, distribution, socialization, education, social control, and emotional and material support, was already well equipped to survive in a new environment.[11] Therefore, the extended family networks formed by Africans during slavery encompassed their cultural heritage, the influence of European institutions, and their bonded economic situation.

Many researchers have failed to recognize the African American extended

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family because it does not resemble the Eurocentric model of the nuclear family, which some consider the only legitimate family form.[12] Those who take a cultural-deviant perspective assert that because African culture was lost during slavery, African American family formation is the result of an unwillingness to assimilate to Eurocentric values. In contrast, the cultural-equivalent perspective recognizes the existence of a distinct culture among African Americans but asserts that the European model of family formation (i.e., nuclear households) is ideal and should be the goal. In contradistinction to these two approaches, the cultural-variant perspective affirms that contemporary African American families are the product of an African culture that transcended the oppressive conditions of slavery and combined with American culture to create a legitimate family form that helps African Americans negotiate in a structurally limiting society.[13]

According to Andrew Billingsley, when people decide to treat one another as family, this effectively forms a family unit.[14] African American women who choose to join African American sororities are adopted into a family unit, or fictive kinship network, that is designed to last a lifetime. This kinship system acts to shape their identities and socialize African American women to assume meaningful leadership roles. The fictive kinship network is an important aspect of African American family life because of its ability to fulfill many functions of the traditional nuclear family and provide additional support.[15] Importantly, this kinship network provides a collective identity through which one is adopted as a sister.[16] Therefore, for African American women, sisterhood is more than a label one uses upon joining a sorority. Rather, sisterhood is about embracing people who are not related by blood into meaningful family-like relations. Although every woman—white or black—who joins a sorority is called a sister, it is different for African American women. For them, a woman is a sister not just because she is in the same sorority; she is a sister because she is an important part of their lives and their "families."

One of the primary ways that African American sororities resemble the African American extended family is the lifetime commitment sorority members make to their organizations. When a person is born biologically, or adopted legally, into a family, he or she is always a member of the family and bears the associated benefits and responsibilities forever. Even death does not sever family ties; long after a person has died, others in the family still regard him or her as a part of the family. This is also the case with African American sororities. Once a woman is adopted into the sorority family, she remains a member for life, and nothing can sever that bond. Whereas most white women stop par-

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ticipating in their sororities after graduation from college, members of African American sororities continue their involvement and engagement for the rest of their lives through alumnae chapters. In fact, African American sorority members pledge to unite with the closest alumnae chapter whenever they move so that the bond of sisterhood remains intact and sorority members can continue their active, symbiotic participation in the life of the "family." Alexandra Berkowitz and Irene Padavic reported that African American women's "sorority affiliation was part of their identity and would remain with them throughout the course of their lives as a source of help and support."[17] For example, when moving to new geographic locations, members of African American sororities have ready-made family networks to help them acclimate and make them feel welcome.

African American women-centered networks, like those found in African American sororities, are a continuation of African cultural traditions and a form of resistance to the interlocking systems of race, class, and gender oppression in the United States. Women-centered networks have always played an important role in the African American community and have effectively functioned to sustain it for centuries. The extended families of slaves were female centered because the very nature of slavery mandated that mother-child bonds take precedence over other arrangements.[18] Furthermore, the gendered division of some slave work allowed slave women the opportunity to cultivate their female identities separate from slave men.[19] When female slaves did work alongside their male counterparts, their feelings of independence and equality were nurtured. According to Deborah Gray White, African American slave women behaved similar to their African ancestors by becoming the center of the family to maintain stability and survival; within these women-centered networks, female slaves cooperated with one another to protect all slaves and to develop their independence and self-sufficiency.[20]

The importance of women-centered networks in African American extended families is not the result of absent men; men may be actively present in culturally significant roles within the family and community.[21] Rather, women are viewed as valuable contributors to the maintenance of the family system and community, and they rely on women-centered networks to accomplish various tasks. Leith Mullings notes that in the African cultures "from which slaves were removed, the definition of masculinity was not based on the dependence of women . . . men and women frequently had independent arenas and occupations, and men and women had asymmetrical but not necessarily unequal roles in society."[22] Furthermore, African American women play sig-

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nificant roles in the extended family system because racial discrimination has kept African American male wages low, meaning that families' survival often depends on the cooperation and work of women.

Just as African American women have been central to sustaining their families and their communities, the sisterhood network of African American sororities has provided avenues for self-improvement, racial uplift, and leadership development. Although they often worked in conjunction with African American fraternities, sororities believed that they could contribute greatly to African American progress. Demonstrating the values taught to them by their ancestors, African American sorority women understood that by bonding together they could transcend gendered racism, forge their own identities, and create meaningful change within African American communities.

## Black Women's Club Movement

African American women's involvement in mutual aid societies began centuries ago. Beginning in the 1700s, African American women established their own mutual aid societies, many inside churches, to help impoverished African Americans.[23] Concerned with morality and being able to prove that African Americans could acculturate, African American women desired to maintain the integrity of the African American family by keeping as many as possible out of the shelters of urban cities.[24] Because free African Americans in the North had few economic opportunities, they were often unable to provide the basic necessities for their families; African American women organized to pool their resources and fill that gap. With strict membership standards, these forerunners of the black women's clubs created leadership opportunities and safe spaces for the development of gendered race consciousness for African American women.

Late in the nineteenth century, African American women began to organize regional clubs specifically to improve the social conditions of African American women and children. This generation of women, which had never experienced slavery, sought to establish their clubs as communities within the larger African American community.[25] Although some black women were welcome in white women's organizations, many decided that organizations run by African American women would be better able to target and serve their constituents. Importantly, many of them believed that investing in African American women would ensure the progress of the race, because it was dependent on the status of its womanhood.[26]

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Instead of operating solitary organizations, these women set out to work together to create a network of organizations and clubs to improve the lives of African American women as well as uplift the race. Mary Ann Shadd Cary established the first African American female organization, the Colored Women's Progressive Association, in 1890; its feminist intentions included mobilizing women to help children, broaden their occupations, and become more politically active.[27] In 1892, after Ida B. Wells gave a rallying antilynching speech, "Victoria Earle Matthews, Susan McKinney, and Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin announced plans to form Black women's clubs in New York City, Brooklyn, and Boston, respectively."[28] Between 1892 and 1894, black women's clubs sprang up throughout the United States, in major metropolitan areas as well as smaller cities. These clubs, and those that followed, tackled numerous issues that affected the lives of African American women, including suffrage, lynching, education, and occupational advancement.

In 1896, determined to engage in self-definition and correct the appalling depiction of African American womanhood by the dominant culture, several African American women's clubs (National Federation of Afro-American Women, Women's Era Club of Boston, and Colored Women's League of Washington, D.C.) merged to form an umbrella organization, known as the National Association of Colored Women (NACW).[29] Mary Church Terrell, the first president of the NACW, adopted a progressive agenda that focused on employment training, wage equity, and child care. With the motto "Lifting as We Climb," the NACW dedicated itself to promoting education among African American women and children; improving family living conditions; promoting the moral, social, economic, and religious welfare of women and children; securing and protecting African Americans' civil and political rights; and promoting interracial cooperation.[30] With cofounders such as Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Addie Waite Hunton, Victoria Matthews, Frances E. W. Harper, Margaret Washington, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, this organization raised funds for kindergartens, orphanages, vocational schools, summer camps, and retirement homes. Through the local clubs, African American women pooled their intellectual and financial resources to raise funds, begin charitable initiatives, and gain the respect of men in positions of power. As part of the emerging African American middle class, members of the NACW wanted to show the world that their goals and interests were no different from those of highly esteemed white women.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the local clubs that made up the NACW consistently fought to improve the lives of African Americans. Be-

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lieving that education and training could overcome any individual's shortcomings, club women gained professional status by engaging in racial work and social work.[31] These educated women had the leisure time to perform community service, as well as work for women's suffrage and African American civil rights. They often did not include women from the lower socioeconomic classes in their organizations; these were the very women in need of the clubs' services, so they were in no position to contribute.[32] Because the African American community trusted the knowledge and expertise of its women, African American women's clubs were often asked to design programs that would meet the immediate needs of the African American community.

The work and accomplishments of the African American women's club movement did not go unnoticed by African American college women. In fact, the black women's clubs, and their insistence on equality, provided a springboard for the development of Alpha Kappa Alpha, the first African American sorority, in 1908. Additionally, Mary Church Terrell and Nannie Helen Burroughs, leaders in the black women's club movement, served as advisers to Delta Sigma Theta during its formative years. Following the compulsion of club women, the founders of Zeta Phi Beta expressly devoted themselves to improving the conditions of African Americans, rather than being a social club. The importance of African American teachers to racial uplift and the club movement is well documented; therefore, it is no surprise that Sigma Gamma Rho continued along this path. Following in the footsteps of the black women's club movement, and understanding that education was a tool for liberating and uplifting African Americans, African American sororities developed a breadth of community service programs that focused on career training, tutoring, helping single mothers, and health education.

## African American Sororities as Coping and Socialization Agents

African American communities have a long history of developing oppositional cultures to resist oppression, refute stereotypical societal expectations, and celebrate and maintain aspects of their own cultures. Within these communities, African American women engage in cultural work to transform, empower, and solidify the community. Collins states, "the power of Black women was the power to make culture, to transmit folkways, norms, and customs as well as build shared ways of seeing the world that insured our survival."[33] This community of culture that black women create through their activities is a culture

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of resistance, allowing them to survive in an oppressive society. More important, Mullings notes that "community is essential for reconstructing ideology, as it may provide the context and validation for rejecting negative stereotypes and developing new ways of knowing."[34] The more formal organizational ties of sororities have sustained African American women and given them a firm and powerful base for their activities.

Although the African American sorority is a community of diverse members, what holds them together is their commitment to a set of shared values and goals. Like African Americans in general, members of African American sororities have always valued education and training; academic achievement; serving others; coalition building to bring about economic, political, and social goals; and strong black-owned private enterprises. Additionally, community is nurtured through the development and sharing of a collective memory of past events.[35] As a result of retelling their stories to neophytes and longstanding members, sororities continue to form and re-form their organizations and the women who belong to them. In retelling their stories, African American sororities highlight the service of their celebrated founders and early members and thus encourage current and aspiring members to continue building community in the same vein.

By creating communities and intentionally developing sisterhood, African American sorority women have been able to affirm and encourage one another while overcoming personal difficulties. Sorority women have the opportunity to mother one another or to act as sisters and friends when needed. Within these relationships, African American women are able to know and define themselves, as well as act to change themselves. For African American women, "self is not defined as the increased autonomy gained by separating oneself from others. Instead, self is found in the context of family and community."[36] Therefore, sororities, as families and communities, present African American women with the interaction and reflection needed to see themselves as they truly are—not as the dominant culture wants them to see themselves.

African American sororities connect their members through networks. Social science research has established that individuals with more network ties experience less loneliness and stress because they receive more support to facilitate coping. Furthermore, more dense networks are apt to provide avenues for communication, which also enhances support. Harold Neighbors and colleagues have shown that, regardless of the type of problem or its severity, African American women tend to use friend and family support networks to cope with their problems and, in so doing, maintain their mental health.[37] Research

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also shows that dense social support networks in which individuals are highly interconnected positively affect mental health; they offer strong supportive ties and provide access to instrumentally useful resources. Although there is disagreement about the specific mechanism by which networks exert their positive influence, it is commonly believed that they improve network members' mental health by easing the stresses associated with daily hassles, life transitions, and life strains.

There are two prominent theories about how support networks positively impact mental health. One theory is that support networks serve as a buffer, protecting members from life stresses. The other theory is that support networks mediate the relationship between life stresses and mental health. In this view, it is believed that everyone experiences the stresses and strains of daily life, but the amount of distress an individual experiences and the degree to which he or she can effectively cope are determined by the presence and quality of the individual's support network. Regardless of which theory one believes, the link between support networks and mental health is clear.

From their inception, African American sororities have created a large sisterly network of social support. These networks sought to socially integrate African American women into college and professional life. Although they were involved in the women's suffrage movement and other community activities, African American sororities were primarily devoted to the development of their individual members.[38] As a result, these sororities created a sense of belonging for their members. Additionally, through their organizational structure and networks, they were able to identify and address the concerns of African American college women. Thus, the sisterhood networks of sororities have been a vehicle for improving the mental health of African American college women.

Throughout history, the dominant culture in the United States has judged African American women by the norms governing white women's behavior. While whites socialized their women to be submissive and dependent, African American women have always worked outside of their homes and viewed themselves as significant contributors to their families' and communities' well-being. Thus, the dominant culture has attempted to define, and therefore control, African American women's independence through a carefully constructed racist ideology. By contrasting the disposition of African American women with the cult of "true" womanhood (i.e., purity, piety, submissiveness, femininity, domesticity) supposedly possessed by white women, the dominant culture has endeavored to keep African American women in a subordinate position. Additionally, whites have used stereotypical images to justify the

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gendered racism carried out against African American women, limit their access to societal resources, and deny them civil rights. There are three dominant stereotypes of African American women: Mammy (the happy, docile servant), Sapphire (the dominant, emasculating female), and Jezebel (the sexually aggressive female).[39] These contrived images were designed to give whites social and economic control of African American women by labeling them as undesirable, unladylike, uneducated, and unfit for any employment outside of domestic and personal service.

African American college women are fully aware that their race and gender are the primary characteristics by which they are judged by the dominant culture. Therefore, a sisterhood network, and the support it provides, is essential in a society where African American women "are the focus of well-elaborated, strongly held, highly contested ideologies concerning race, class, and gender."[40] The sorority sisterhood network is a vehicle through which African American females reconstruct their identities, allowing them to refute the stereotypical images created by the dominant culture and redefine themselves. Although whites have placed these images in the media to make African American women appear deserving of the poor conditions and discrimination they experience, through sororities, African American women have demanded the right to define themselves and their reality. Within the safe spaces that African American women have created in their sororities, they speak freely, resist white dominance, and define themselves.[41] Moreover, within the sorority, there are numerous women with whom the members can compare themselves and identify, and that they can select as role models.[42]

The oppressive systems of racism and sexism operating in the larger U.S. society also operate within society's institutions of higher education. For example, Jacqueline Fleming asserts that historically white universities are designed for white males, and historically black universities are designed for African American males.[43] Therefore, there are no universities designed to meet African American women's needs. As a result, these women have had to rely on their female-centered networks to access the support they need. As African American women matriculated into U.S. colleges and universities, sororities provided a ready-made social network to help them navigate the new terrain and persist to graduation.

Importantly, African American women do not join black Greek-letter organizations primarily to increase their chances of finding husbands, unlike their white counterparts. Rather, they join to improve themselves and the African American community. Berkowitz and Padavic found that members of

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African American sororities are more likely to learn how to become economically self-sufficient and how to contribute to their community.[44] Likewise, African American women join sororities as a way to boost their careers through networking and skills development. Whereas social functions in white sororities are designed to allow members to find suitable lifelong partners, social functions in African American sororities are usually fund-raising mechanisms for community organizations or for social outreach and programming.[45]

Undoubtedly, African American sororities have played an important role in womanist and racial identity development, although research in this area is limited. What is clear is that African American women who join sororities bring with them the lessons learned from their mothers. African American daughters are taught at an early age that they are expected to work hard and receive an education so that they can support themselves and contribute to the well-being of their communities. Furthermore, African American mothers encourage their daughters to develop skills that will allow them to compete and survive in a racist and sexist society.[46] African American sororities provide a vehicle for accomplishing these important tasks.

## Ongoing and Contemporary Challenges

Although African American sororities have clearly acted to ensure the success of their members and to serve as agents of social change for the African American community, this does not negate the difficulties with which they have had to contend. For example, African American sororities have been charged with elitism, fierce intersorority competition, and intraracial colorism. These charges are not unique to African American sororities, because racism, sexism, and classism are part of the fabric of U.S. society and affect most organizations, including African American ones.

For all the good they have accomplished, African American sororities (and fraternities, for that matter) have long been accused of elitism. Beginning with Frazier, black Greek-letter organizations have been characterized as "the main expressions of social snobbishness on the part of the black bourgeoisie."[47] Because their social activities were designed to cultivate and maintain middle-class values, some African American sororities deemed certain women to be inappropriate candidates for membership. Similarly, as African American sororities followed the path of the women's club movement in addressing the needs of the black community, some women may have been viewed as more

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appropriate recipients of a sorority's community services rather than as worthy participants. Likewise, some sorority members smugly acknowledge that not all women are suitable for membership in their organizations. This exclusivist posture also appears to be practiced along class lines by some sororities on some college campuses. For example, although numerous sororities hold fund-raisers to help prospective and current members pay their membership fees and dues, other sororities insist that prospective and current members have a certain attire and the means to afford various kinds of paraphernalia. Such requirements preclude, or at least make difficult, the participation of less well-off African American women. Moreover, the focus of some sororities seems to be that of a social club, requiring members to have the "right background."

Competition between similar organizations is not unusual. However, many believe that the tenor of this competition is not beneficial to the African American community. As Lawrence Graham states, "the competition that exists between the AKAs and the Deltas is so widely acknowledged that it is unusual to find a well-educated black woman who remains neutral on the issue."[48] Many African American women insist that making negative comments when encountering members of other sororities, such as "everyone is entitled to one mistake," is not intended to demean the other sorority. However, most admit that they believe that such statements are true at some level. AKAs and Deltas argue over which is the first sorority, and some AKAs and Deltas discount the existence and contributions of Zeta Phi Beta and Sigma Gamma Rho. As they jockey for position and status on college campuses where African American women still struggle to succeed, African American sororities' engagement in such negative competition is disheartening and appears petty. After all, there are more important concerns in the African American community than what colors one wears.

The U.S. cultural standard of beauty has also affected African American sororities. Intraracial colorism and eating disorders among African American sorority members rarely make the news. However, because these issues affect African American women generally, it is likely that they are present in African American sororities as well. Most of the discussion of colorism in African American sororities is anecdotal and is definitely not recorded in the sororities' historical documents. Some members even refute the presence of colorism by asserting that at the time of the sororities' founding, most African American college students were mulatto because of the nature of slavery and racism in the United States.[49] With that said, very few college-educated women

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are unaware of the stereotypes attributed to each of the African American sororities. For example, AKAs are renowned for their light-skinned good looks, an image that is reflected by the words and gestures of their step routines, in which they use their hands to represent mirrors. In addition, "paper bag tests" have reportedly been used to determine the acceptability of candidates, denying membership to those whose skin is not lighter than a brown grocery bag.[50]

A related issue is the impact of U.S. standards of beauty on African American women's satisfaction with their bodies. As African American women experience more integration and acculturation, they may be encouraged to adopt white models of thinness and seek to control their body weight through eating disorders. According to Becky Thompson, when eating disorders occur among African American women within a culture of thinness, the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and gender are also involved.[51] In other words, eating disorders among African American women are often coping strategies to regain some sense of control. There is a paucity of research on eating disorders among African American women generally and sorority women in particular. Sororities, as communities and social support networks, have undeniably helped African American women cope with the stress that accompanies gendered racism. However, we know very little about other, less acceptable ways of coping that African American sorority women might use.

## Conclusion

African American sororities and other women-centered networks have played an active role in transmitting African and African American culture to succeeding generations and in meeting the needs of African American women and the African American community. It is on the backs of such organizations that many African American women have been able to rise above the racism and sexism of U.S. society, claim and craft identities for themselves that are empowering and uplifting, and stand tall to face the challenges of ushering in a new world order in which justice and equality reign rather than de jure and de facto discrimination and oppression. This is not surprising, given that the founders and advisers of African American sororities were pioneers in the women's suffrage movement, the civil rights movement, and other community-wide initiatives aimed at improving conditions for all African Americans. Without question, African American sororities have played a key role in advancing the cause of African Americans in this country.

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Yet, for all they have accomplished in the past, an important question remains about the role of African American sororities in the future. With progress and the changing nature of racism, questions about the viability and necessity of African American sororities have surfaced, especially as membership has declined in recent years. With public figures such as Mariah Carey and Tiger Woods insisting on their multiracial, as opposed to African American, status, and with assimilation continuing to be an important goal for many, more and more African Americans fail to see the importance of joining predominantly African American organizations and choose to participate in organizations that are more integrated.

Today, approximately 70 percent of African American students attend predominantly white institutions, and these students are seeking—and increasingly obtaining—leadership opportunities and positions within the previously white-only campus organizations. With blatant discrimination and formal segregation rarer, African American college women have the option to join predominantly white sororities, and many have done just that. What, therefore, will be the role of African American sororities in the future? How will they continue to be the bearers of African American culture and tradition in the midst of a changing generation of African Americans? And as this new generation joins African American sororities, what impact will they have on these organizations? Research is needed to answer these and many other important questions about the role of African American sororities today and in the future.

African American sororities have a history of surviving and thriving in tumultuous times, of overcoming seemingly insurmountable obstacles to accomplish great gains. Although they have had (and continue to have) many internal struggles (e.g., colorism, elitism, unhealthy competition), and although they are faced with a tough challenge to continue to be relevant in the face of a changing African American demographic, I am confident that they will continue to play an important role in the socialization of African American women and in advancing the cause of racial uplift. I suspect that, in the words of Maya Angelou, African American sorority members will continue to shout with a unified voice: "And still I rise!"

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## Notes

1. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 146.

2. Joe R. Feagin and Clairece B. Feagin, *Racial and Ethnic Relations,* 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1999).

3. Arthur de Gobineau wrote *The Inequality of Human Races,* which argued that genetics and race are directly related to individual intelligence and the advancement of society. He argued that one reason for the superiority of white races is their "unrivaled beauty." According to de Gobineau, racial mixing is the cause of the decline of civilization; he argued that society is destroyed when civilized peoples mix with those who are incapable of civilization. Originally published in 1967 by Howard Fertig, it was reprinted in 1999 and has begun to be taken seriously again by many readers as scientific proof of white supremacy.

4. Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1859, and it sold out on its first day. The book began to transform attitudes about society and religion and was soon used to justify the philosophies of communists, socialists, capitalists, and even Germany's National Socialists. It has been reprinted many times, most recently in 1995 by Gramercy Press.

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# Part III

## Contemporary Issues Confronting Black Greek-Letter Organizations



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# 13

# Racism, Sexism, and Aggression

## A Study of Black and White Fraternities

*Tyra Black, Joanne Belknap, and Jennifer Ginsburg*

Rape has been cited as the most prevalent serious crime on college campuses.[1] Numerous studies report that college women are at significant risk of being raped,[2] and in a study of college men, one third of those questioned admitted that they would rape a woman if they knew they could get away with it.[3] In the past two decades, a considerable amount of research has documented the problem of rape in fraternities.[4] This chapter summarizes that research, which has been conducted almost exclusively within the white Greek system.[5] We then report the findings of our study on fraternities and aggression, the only one to date that included the black Greek system.[6]

## The White Greek System

### ALCOHOL CULTURE IN THE WHITE GREEK SYSTEM

A significant factor in the relationship between fraternities and rape is *alcohol consumption.* Large-scale studies of white Greek and non-Greek men and women on college campuses indicate that white Greek men drink significantly more than any other group, white Greek women drink more than white non-Greek women, and white non-Greek men and white Greek women consume similar levels of alcohol.[7] Similarly, although white sororities and fraternities both have some moderate drinkers, heavy drinkers are far more common in fraternities than in sororities.[8] For example, white Greek men are more likely than white Greek women to have been binge drinkers in high school.[9] White men who pledge white fraternities report significantly higher alcohol consumption in high school than those who do not pledge,[10] and white Greek men and women report significantly lower rates of alcohol-related risks (e.g., negative



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behavioral effects resulting from excessive alcohol use) than do white non-Greek students.[11]

According to one study on white fraternities, drinking alcohol and getting high on drugs often serve as social aides in helping men find sexual partners.[12] In one study of white Greeks, both sorority and fraternity members reported that the opposite sex's consumption of alcohol made them "sexier." Even the mere presence of alcohol, regardless of its consumption, triggers the initiation of sex among white college students.[13] Furthermore, men are more likely to initiate sex when the woman has consumed alcohol. Stated another way, alcohol-drinking women are perceived to be more "sexually available" than women who are not drinking alcohol.[14]

Some research has examined how individuals assess blame when sexual abuse occurs in the context of a dating relationship, particularly in terms of alcohol consumption by the victim, the offender, or both.[15] One such study used vignettes (written scenarios) and had the study participants rate the victims' culpability for rape; it found that male and female college students were most likely to hold victims accountable for rape when the victims were intoxicated.[16] Another study of women aged twenty-one to twenty-nine used dating vignettes depicting various sexual victimization risks; it found that although the women "recognized the potential danger of sexual aggression [in dating relationships], this recognition frequently was overridden by a desire to facilitate the relationship, and/or a belief that any potential sexual aggression had to be successfully managed."[17] Abbey, however, states the importance of acknowledging that alcohol does not *cause* rape; rather, alcohol consumption by men increases the likelihood that they will (1) misperceive friendly behavior by women as sexual advances and (2) find it easier to force sex on their female companions when they (the men) are sexually aroused.[18]

To fully understand the role of alcohol in the white Greek setting, it is helpful to examine the use of alcohol at parties. Research indicates that alcohol consumption is a significant aspect of socializing in the white Greek system on college campuses, and drinking is heaviest at white Greek social events.[19] Not surprisingly, heavy alcohol consumption is most likely among white fraternity pledges when they perceive alcohol as a valued way to socialize.[20] Research on white fraternity rape and date rape shows a strong association between alcohol or drug consumption and sexual victimization.[21] In particular, research on white Greeks indicates that drunkenness or drug use fosters a rape climate by suggesting that a man who rapes when he is high or drunk is not responsible for his actions.[22] Thus, it is not surprising that white males in many col-

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lege social groups use alcohol as a justification for acting out and treating women as sexual objects.[23]

Often, these same white men encourage their potential victims to use alcohol and drugs, in an attempt to overcome their victims' sexual reluctance. In fact, these white rapists may plan how to use alcohol and drugs to stave off their victims' resistance to sexual acts.[24] Research confirms that this plan is often effective; being in a drug- or alcohol-induced state does indeed hamper a victim's ability to resist a sexual assault, particularly if she is unconscious.[25] Finally, whereas alcohol or drug use by sexual predators is frequently used as an excuse or explanation for their abusive acts, victims who have used drugs or alcohol are likely to be considered at least partially responsible for their victimization.[26]

Boswell and Spade's study categorized white fraternities as being at low, medium, or high risk for rapes. They found that the heaviest drinking occurred in the high-risk fraternities and that high levels of alcohol consumption resulted in fewer conversations and socializing and fewer positive interactions between the sexes. The high-risk white fraternities controlled the drinking options at their events, to the point where nonalcoholic beverages were not available; this, in effect, coerced women into consuming alcohol, making them less difficult to dominate once they were inebriated.[27] Another study found that male peer support for the sexual victimization of women exists and is related to heavy alcohol use; however, this phenomenon is not restricted to fraternities but is found among many white men across campus.[28]

## SEXIST CULTURE IN THE WHITE GREEK SYSTEM

In addition to the link between drugs and alcohol and sexual victimization in white fraternities, it is important to emphasize the *sexist culture* in many of these institutions. For example, white fraternity men are more likely than their nonfraternity counterparts to believe that women like to be physically "roughed up," women want to be forced into sex, women have secret desires to be raped, men should be the controllers of the relationship, and sexually liberated women are promiscuous.[29] An anecdotal publication notes that the white Greek system, particularly during parties and other social events, stresses women's roles as sex objects.[30] Not surprisingly, then, a study of white fraternity men found that they were least likely to stop sexual activity resisted by their victims when they perceived the resistance to be passive (less physical), when they felt that it was important to prove their sexual prowess, or when the

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women had indicated their consent to some of the earlier sexual activity (such as kissing or petting).[31]

Some research has been conducted to understand the specific sexual victimization risks of women in white sororities. As expected, both white Greek men and white Greek women take part in a large number of white Greek social events, which frequently include other white Greek houses of the opposite sex.[32] White sorority women tend to be most afraid of stranger rapes, while they regard white fraternity men as integral parts of their socializing events and the most appropriate dates and partners for themselves.[33] Some research indicates that white sorority women have a high risk of sexual victimization,[34] but another study claims that white Greek women's risk of rape is not significantly higher than that of non-Greek white women.[35] Yet another study found that white sorority women are more likely than their nonsorority counterparts to accept rape myths and acts of interpersonal violence.[36] White sorority women are also more likely than their non-Greek sisters to have been forced or threatened into sexual intercourse and to have had nonconsensual sexual intercourse while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. However, the same study found that there are no differences between white sorority and nonsorority women in terms of reported sexual victimization that is classified as nonviolent, social, or coercive in nature.[37]

## Comparison of Black and White Fraternities

### METHODOLOGY

In the summer of 1996, the three authors conducted in-depth interviews with twenty-two individuals: six white men (one of whom was the director of the Greek system on the campus), six black men, one Asian American man (of Pakistani descent and a member of a white fraternity), five white women, and four black women. The site was a large, urban state university in the Midwest, in existence since the early 1800s. The university had almost 34,000 students; about 11 percent of the student population was black, 9.4 percent of the students lived on campus, and 2.2 percent of all students lived in sorority or fraternity houses.

We used two methods to draw people into the study. First, all three authors had contacts with some members of the Greek system at the university. Second, we placed flyers around campus and encouraged those who partici-

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pated in the study to tell their Greek friends about us. There was strong resistance from many in the white Greek system. Within a week of advertising the study, at a joint meeting of the white Greek-letter organization on campus, fraternity and sorority members were strongly discouraged from taking part in our study and were told that we were biased against the Greek system. (A few students in the white Greek system reported this to us.)

All the interviews were conducted one on one: one researcher and one informant. The first author is black and the other two are white. We attempted to match the interviewer and interviewee by race, believing that white Greek members would be more likely to report their own and other Greek members' racism to white researchers, and that black Greek members would feel safer reporting their experiences with racism to a black researcher. There was only one instance when we failed to match interviewer and interviewee by race. Notably, this was the one case in which the informant (a black woman) reported (to a white researcher) having been raped in the Greek system. The majority of the interview questions were composed drawing on Boswell and Spade's 1996 study, which attempted to distinguish high-risk from low-risk fraternities (in terms of rape), albeit using an all-white fraternity sample.[38] Due to concerns expressed by the university's Human Subjects Committee, we never asked the respondents whether they had been victims or perpetrators of sexual victimization in fraternities; we asked whether they knew of such cases and about the reputations of the various fraternities (in terms of rape risk). Unless otherwise attributed, all the quotations that follow are from these interviews.

Although we began this study to identify racial differences between black and white fraternities in terms of the sexual victimization of women, our findings also involve racism in general, which was rampant at this university, including in the Greek system. We also found that it was important to report on the nonsexual male-on-male physical aggression in the fraternities. In short, we have five areas of findings: noninstitutional and institutional racism in the Greek fraternity system; the role of alcohol, drugs, and parties; the role of a sexist culture; nonsexual physical abuse; and sexual abuse.

## RACISM IN THE GREEK SYSTEM

*Noninstitutional Racism.* Racial segregation is a strong component in both the black and the white Greek systems. For example, black and white fraternities tend to party and participate in other activities with individuals of their

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own race. Although both black and white fraternity members claimed that their parties were open to everyone, they all reported that fraternity parties tend to be racially segregated. Black fraternity members reported that white men had never pledged their fraternities. One black fraternity member reported this with some disgust, noting that his fraternity was "all" black, despite the fact that it had been labeled "interracial" since 1945. Both white fraternity and sorority members attempted to make these racial divisions seem "normal." At the same time, all the black participants reported a racially hostile campus and white Greek system.

Many of the black fraternity members reported that their organizations provide a haven from the racism on campus and a means of uplifting African American men and women. One black man stated that black members talk a great deal about graduation, jobs, and community service. All the black women interviewed in this study gave positive examples of how black fraternity members support them. One black woman claimed that the black fraternities are dedicated to rebuilding the community, both socially and academically. Another black woman reported that if a black fraternity member had a female friend who was interested in one of his fraternity brothers who slept around and did not respect women, he would warn the woman not to get involved with his "brother." Another black woman reported that the black fraternities are always supportive of black sororities' suggestions for combined events. Thus, black fraternity members reported the importance of their organizations in uplifting African American men and women on campus, *and* they gave examples of how this was achieved.

The African American male and female respondents reported prevalent racism in the white Greek system and in the university as a whole. White participants, in contrast, indicated that racism is minimal on campus. Notably, the majority of the white male participants admitted that other members of their fraternity believe in stereotypes and hold racist attitudes about African Americans. In other words, there seems to be a lack of responsibility and accountability for the racism that exists in the white fraternity culture.

The interview question "Are there commonly held beliefs about race and racism in your fraternity?" yielded some interesting but disturbing responses. One white fraternity member said that his fraternity was racist "up to a point," but it was in how they "joked," concluding, "There's a difference between joking around [telling racist jokes] and actually meaning it." Similarly, another white fraternity member stated, "I don't know of anyone in our house that is racist," but "there's a couple of members who sometimes, you know, spouted

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out or just lashed out things like 'dumb nigger.'" Here is a statement from another white fraternity man who participated in our study:

> White people don't go to their [black fraternity] parties, and they don't go to our [white fraternity] parties. It's completely divided. I do know a few black guys that were accepted, but for the most part, it does not happen. The ones that were accepted were basically white. There was one particular black guy that joined a white fraternity. He was really popular, he dressed really nice, and he didn't act like he was "down," so to speak, so I guess that's why the people in the [white] Greek system liked him.

A white woman, referring to the same black member of a white fraternity, reported an incident in which he allegedly stole money from the fraternity treasury. She claimed that the common response from his white "brothers" was, "It figures that [the] nigger stole."

A black fraternity member reported: "The [racist] shit exists, especially on this campus. Just because people are not vocally saying the word 'nigger' does not mean that they are not calling you that behind your back." This was confirmed in numerous interviews with white fraternity members, who insisted that calling blacks "niggers" does not mean that they are racist.

White fraternity members typically minimized the racism in their houses. These two accounts by white fraternity members are examples:

> I would say, well, yeah, some guys are racial [*sic*], but they don't let it affect their day-to-day things. They'll sit beside two black guys in class and not have a problem with it, but as soon as someone steals their stereo out of their car, I guarantee they think it's a black guy. That's about as far as it goes.

> There's amongst some members the stereotype about African Americans that they're inferior, but I wouldn't say it's a common thread. The problem is that those who do have that opinion tend to be very vocal. . . . When it [racism] does happen it is generally the result of something. Somebody will make a comment as a result of walking down the street and having an experience that went into that comment, whether it's right or wrong, that comment was made. But I think it's on a smaller scale.

Two white fraternity members reported in the interviews a "game" or "trick" they play on women at their parties called "cheeky-cheeky-nosy-nosy." They hold a lit match to the bottom of a beer can to make it black and then spend

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the evening repeatedly touching the bottom of the can and then a woman's face to make it black, and she is unaware of the joke. Although this is not necessarily racist, given the context of the other findings in this study, it is at least potentially racist (and sexist). One white fraternity member described this game as follows: "And before you know it, the person is completely black, and that's the whole joke of the game. You find some naive girl and everyone has a good time with that."

Some of the black respondents voiced the opinion that black fraternities and sororities were needed on campus, given that campus events were generally for the white students. One black man reported that his fraternity challenged the historical "whitewashing" of homecoming, noting that although there were more than 30,000 students on campus of various races, "their homecoming is 100 percent Caucasian. This includes performances as well as activities. So we [his fraternity] tried to have our own homecoming, but the university officials said that we were being racist and could not do this.

Another indication that the university Greek system caters to the white Greeks came from the director of the Greek system, a former member of a white fraternity at another university. When he was asked to list the fraternities on campus and then indicate which were considered high and low risk for rape, he neglected to mention any of the black fraternities. When the interviewer asked whether any of the listed organizations were black fraternities, the director sheepishly stated, "Oh, I forgot about them." He went on to state, however, that the black fraternities were "high risk" for rape, although this was never confirmed in *any* of the interviews with fraternity and sorority members. Indeed, when asked directly about the fraternities that he "forgot about," the director stated that in black fraternities, "sexual assaults are a cultural thing more than anything." This statement has serious racist ramifications, particularly given that it is not supported by facts. It is reminiscent of Angela Y. Davis's "myth of the black rapist." Davis notes that although black women have historically been at high risk of being raped by white men, the Ku Klux Klan and others promote a false image of the risk of black men raping white women.[39] Thus, even though the rape of black women by white men has been far more prevalent than the rape of white women by black men, there is a strong cultural stereotype of black men as sexual predators of white women.

*Institutional Racism.* In addition to the rampant ignorance about black fraternities and the racist stereotypes reported by the white Greeks in our study, a significant element of the institutional racism on campus is the absence of

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black fraternity houses due to a lack of sponsors and funding. In contrast, white fraternities are sponsored and funded by alumni, who appear to be exceptionally wealthy. This distinction between having and not having a house is a major structural difference between the black and white fraternities. Whereas the white fraternities have huge, usually beautiful houses adjacent to the university, the black fraternities have none.

Thus, black fraternity parties are commonly held in apartments, in residence hall rooms, or at bars. Having to rent halls or campus rooms results in black fraternity parties being formally supervised by campus authorities (campus police or security guards), and alcohol is not allowed. The only monitoring reported at white fraternity parties is by designated fraternity members. This likely explains the disproportionately higher rate of disciplinary actions directed at black compared with white fraternities on this campus. In addition, this high visibility and stringent monitoring of their parties makes the black fraternities more accountable than the white fraternities for their behavior. Black fraternity members also reported that their on-campus parties have to end by 1:00 A.M., and the lights have to be kept on during the parties. In serious contrast, white fraternities can party the day and night away, with no supervision and no restrictions on alcohol (or drugs) or ending times.

In both the white and black fraternities, there were reports of women being pressured to drink at parties. One black fraternity member described a "special punch" for the women who attended smaller parties in members' apartments, which were not monitored. He stated, "Our punch is especially made for women. It's a special drink made up by the brothers that contains different liquors. The punch is made for women to enjoy themselves."

When asked what a "typical" day for a fraternity member is like, the staggering racial differences appeared to be tied to access to a fraternity house. The white fraternity members reported eating at the fraternity house and hanging out there virtually all the time, except to attend classes. The black fraternity members, in contrast, reported getting up, going to classes, meeting with other black students to eat lunch in the student union, and going back to classes. During the week, they might meet with a few others at someone's apartment. One black man reported, "Everybody goes to class, and we might meet up in the union around noon and congregate with all of the other students. Then later that evening we might get together if we have a meeting or something and go over some of the programmatic sides of the fraternity so that we can put on some cultural or educational programs for the campus."

Yet another way that racism was institutionalized, in the form of economic

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ties to larger chapters, was evident when the fraternities got into some kind of official trouble. In our study, two white fraternity members spoke openly about "finding the loopholes" when they were sanctioned. The president of one white fraternity reported an incident where "things got violent" and neighbors called the police; although there were originally four charges, the only one that "stuck" was for vandalism. The fraternity was supposed to do 800 hours of community service but managed to do just 20. He reported, "there's loopholes everywhere. It's just a matter of finding them. That's the fun." Another white fraternity member noted that many of the large contributors to the university are former members of the white fraternities. When current members get into trouble, they contact these donors and ask for help; typically, university officials bend over backward to accommodate the donors and minimize or drop the charges against the white fraternity members. Such opportunities and "loopholes" for getting out of trouble with the university were *never* mentioned by the black respondents. This practice of "finding the loopholes," which frequently results in dropped charges for white members, feeds the racial stereotype of blacks as troublemakers.

### ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND PARTIES

Given that black fraternity parties tend to be in rented halls with official supervision and scrutiny, any alcohol or drug consumption has to be done prior to arriving at the party. Additionally, the monitoring of black fraternity parties is made easier by the fact that rented halls typically consist of one big open room, whereas the white fraternity houses have many rooms on various floors. In theory, white and black fraternities are subject to the same alcohol and drug restrictions under university and National Pan-Hellenic Council policies. In practice, these rules are routinely enforced for the black fraternities but are enforced only rarely for the white fraternities, such as when the police are called to their parties. Stated differently, although both black and white fraternities are controlled by the same alcohol and drug policies, white fraternities engage in far greater alcohol and drug consumption at their parties. In fact, some of the study participants reported that it was not uncommon for the white fraternity "monitors" to consume large amounts of alcohol while they are supposed to be monitoring others' drinking. Many of the white women reported that underage drinking is a significant problem at the white fraternity parties, where the younger women in particular are encouraged to drink. In contrast, one black fraternity member reported, "If someone wants to get

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drunk, then they will do it before they get there [to the party]. . . . A lot of times we're throwing parties at other people's facilities and a lot of times they have a positive image as far as whether it be a scholarship dance or something like that. We're not going to serve alcohol at a scholarship dance, I'm sorry. It just would not look right. It's not distinguished."

The use of marijuana appeared to occur covertly in both black and white fraternities. For example, one white woman whose sorority interacted with several white fraternities reported, "The alcohol is very visible; the drugs are not visible at all unless you know people." Another white female participant who frequented numerous white fraternity parties claimed, "Drinking alcohol is permitted pretty much everywhere in the house. If a person is going to smoke marijuana, they go in their bedrooms and close the door." The interviews with the various Greek students in this study indicated that the white fraternity culture is centered more on alcohol, as opposed to drugs. The black fraternity culture appeared to value alcohol as well, but not to the extent of the white fraternities. Although the black male participants in our study denied drug use, interviews with some of the women suggested that marijuana smoking is common in black fraternities. Nevertheless, if the black members want to smoke marijuana, they have to do so before their parties.

It is important to note that substance abuse is not limited to alcohol and marijuana, particularly in some of the white fraternities. Although alcohol and marijuana appear to be the most common "drugs of choice" in the black fraternities, alcohol, marijuana, and cocaine are the most common drugs of choice reported in the white fraternities.

Again, our study suggests that the emphasis on alcohol is far greater in white than black fraternities. We attribute at least some of this to the fact that the white fraternities have their own houses, the members live together, and they have a seemingly endless supply of alcohol. The white women in our study who frequented white fraternity parties and other activities and spent time just "hanging out" at the fraternity houses routinely reported alcohol to be problematic. Their concerns centered around two themes. The first concern was that the majority of activities, as well as daily routines, were centered around alcohol. One woman who interacted with several white fraternities indicated that a typical day in these fraternities often included daily alcohol abuse, skipping classes, sleeping during the day, and watching television. Such lax behavior appeared to be institutionally tolerated, given that fraternity members were required to meet only minimal standards (e.g., 2.0 grade point average) to remain active members. Alcohol was so valued that some of the white fraterni-

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ties collected yearly alcohol dues from members. One white male participant reported that his fraternity spent between $60 and $100 a week just for beer. This did not include the money that was commonly collected from each fraternity member prior to parties to pay for more expensive liquor. However, it is important to point out that the white fraternities varied in their alcohol consumption. Those with lower consumption tended to have bring-your-own-booze functions.

The women's second concern was that their treatment by white fraternities depended on whether they took part in the alcohol consumption. One white woman reported that the pressure to drink alcohol was overwhelming, calling it the most intense pressure she experienced in her undergraduate career. Another white woman who went to numerous white fraternity functions claimed, "Guys like girls who are fun and can get wasted." Yet another white woman reported that drinking alcohol was necessary to be "cool" and that the purpose of drinking was to get drunk, not to be a social drinker. Some participants referred to the "beer in hand rule" that some white fraternities had. According to this rule, women should always have a drink in their hands. Some women reported just holding the same drink all night. The white women in this study were far more likely than the black women to report pressure to drink in order to be accepted by fraternity members.

Notably, the white men acknowledged pressuring only their fellow *fraternity* members to drink alcohol. One white fraternity member indicated that four men in his fraternity were taunted because they did not drink alcohol for religious reasons. Although the taunting the women reported was far more intense than that reported by the men, it was never addressed by any of the male respondents. In sum, alcohol abuse appears to be so embedded in the white fraternity culture that both males and females are harassed and insulted for not taking part. In contrast, neither the black women nor the black men reported anyone being pressured to drink alcohol.

Alcohol abuse within the white fraternities was so problematic that the university implemented formal rules, such as "Dry Rush," to try to reduce alcohol use and abuse. In addition, kegs and the central distribution of alcohol at fraternity parties were prohibited without a vending license. Despite these constraints, alcohol was still present during rush week, and kegs of beer were still available at many of the white fraternities, according to our participants. Two white sorority members stated that many fraternities have high insurance premiums, which appears to be linked to alcohol abuse and uncontrolled behavior. In short, the university's antialcohol policies have had little impact on

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the white fraternities. Some of the white women reported that despite the greater availability of alcohol at fraternity parties compared with sorority parties, fraternities were far less likely to be reprimanded for alcohol violations. Even when the white Greeks held "two-way parties" (joint fraternity-sorority parties), if they were "busted" for alcohol violations, the sororities were more likely than the fraternities to be held responsible for the alcohol infractions and to have university sanctions brought against them.

The degree of institutionalized drinking in the white fraternities is illustrated by the number of named drinking games: Three-Man is played with dice and up to 100 people, Zoo involves rhythm patterns and identifying different animals, Monopoly is a drinking game similar to the board game of the same name, and Century Club requires a person to drink one shot of beer each minute for 100 minutes. There are even different types of drinking parties, each with its own name: at a Fireman's Party, a fire truck is parked on the front lawn of the fraternity house, and everyone drinks beer; Around the World is a party where a different drink is served in each room of the house; and at Keg and Eggs parties, the drinking starts at 6:00 A.M. and includes a breakfast of eggs cooked with beer. The Policeman's Party involves putting people (usually women) in a makeshift jail on the house property, usually for "violations" such as "not drinking enough." To get out of jail, the "prisoner" has to drink two beers. Notably, the name the white fraternity members give to their marijuana-smoking parties has strong racist implications: Rasta Party.

In contrast to the alcohol-centered white fraternity parties, black fraternity parties focus on dancing competitions and, when they are private enough, consuming marijuana. Even the names of the parties are significantly different. Whereas the white fraternity party names often refer to alcohol or sex, the black party names tend to reflect campus events: Ice-Breaker for the beginning-of-the-year party, Graduation, and Back to School. Many of the black fraternity parties focus on dance competitions, also referred to as "stepping." Stepping involves fraternity members forming a single-file line around the perimeter of the party and performing well-rehearsed dance steps while chanting about the superiority of their particular fraternity.[40] Dance-related parties in the black fraternities are given the names Rump Shaker, Black and Gold Jam, and Low-Income Jam. A party that centers around smoking marijuana is called the Smoker's Party. One black fraternity member reported that about once a year his organization holds a Voter Registration Party, "which is a real big party to get people to vote." This is in stark contrast to the party themes in the white fraternities, none of which reported using parties to raise money for

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good causes or to sponsor anything as civic-minded as voting. Additionally, some of the black fraternity members bemoaned the fact that they needed money to make money, and they did not have it: "We can't have parties. Well, we can have parties, but they cost too much and they don't end at the proper time for a college student. It's difficult because we can't have concerts because we can't afford them. The major fund-raisers for black Greek-letter organizations are parties, and since we can't have them, we don't have too much money and we don't have a house, so that's just some of the limitations." Another black fraternity member stated the following in response to a question about where the parties were usually located: "We try to keep them close to campus even though we cannot have them on campus. So it's really a big job trying to find a place to have a party, especially on campus. I mean, we have all of these buildings, yet none of them we can use. They also overcharge us for security." In response to a question about the types of restrictions placed on his fraternity, one black man said: "I could go on for days. As far as what we can do on campus, they limit us a lot. What kinds of political programs we can have, they limit us. As far as social events, they have cut it down. They charge us to have social events on campus, whereas other events or other people they don't charge."

## THE SEXIST CULTURE OF FRATERNITIES

Like their drinking parties, white fraternities also have names for some of their sexist parties, many of which the white sororities "put on" with the fraternities. These parties and games frequently depict women as the sexual property of men, portraying the men as powerful and the women as sex objects. Derby Days parties are competitions that involve a variety of skits, sometimes sexual in nature, and an obstacle course where the men carry the women on their backs. In the Dating Game, members of fraternities and sororities are set up on dates. At the Belly Flop Contest, a woman in each sorority is chosen to strip from a costume to a bathing suit and then belly-flop off a tall block into a pool of water while the other sorority and fraternity members watch. Paddy Murphy involves a week of hot-tubbing and drinking for both white sororities and fraternities. Given the sexual connotation of hot tubs, the skimpiness of bathing suits, and hot water's ability to enhance the effects on alcohol, this seems to be a high-risk activity in terms of rape. Another white fraternity party is called Everybody Gets Screwed, with its obvious sexual connotation. At this party, each woman is given a bolt and each man is given a screw; then they

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have to find the screws and bolts that match. One white fraternity man reported that this is a good way for the younger, shyer men to meet women. At the party called Anything for a Buck, the implication is that anything sexual can be had for a dollar, which places undue pressure on the attendees to have sex. The white men describing this party said, "they basically turn into a big orgy, well maybe not that far." One white fraternity member reported that the prizes at these parties are often something like a television box filled with condoms. The names and activities of these parties often imply that female attendees will be having sex with the fraternity members.

The white sorority sisters' cooperation with these sexist fraternity activities is remarkable. For example, one former sorority member pointed out that in order to live in some sorority houses, each member has to accumulate a certain number of points, which are earned by going to fraternity parties. Clearly, this pressures sorority women to attend these often sexually exploitative parties.

Women typically make up a higher percentage of attendees at black Greek parties than at white Greek parties. One black fraternity member stated, "The parties are for everybody, but we try to limit the amount of men that come into the party. We try to have more variety as far as women are concerned. We like to have a big woman turnout." Several black fraternity members indicated that one of the goals of their parties is to have more women than men present. One of the motivations for limiting the number of men is to decrease the likelihood of physical confrontations between the men. In contrast, white fraternity members reported that the ratio of males to females at parties is typically 1:1 to 2:1.

People attend both white and black fraternity parties either as singles or in groups, but more male-female interaction occurs at black fraternity parties. Five black fraternity members and five women who regularly associated with black fraternities indicated that men and women typically dance as couples at black Greek parties, whereas the majority of white Greek men and women reported that dancing usually occurs among either groups of males or groups of females. It is also interesting to note that dating relationships are commonly discouraged in the white fraternities. One white fraternity member reported, "We don't have girlfriends . . . I don't know why, if it's bred into us that way or what. Girlfriends hold you back. It's kind of a general feeling. . . . They hold you back from having a good college experience. . . . Being free to be with a lot of women if you so choose to." White fraternity members were often ridiculed for "lavaliering" a woman (also referred to as "pinning" or making a commit-

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ment to a relationship). One white woman stated, "Certain fraternities have lavaliere ceremonies where they do really cruel and abusive things to the boys for lavaliering the girl. One fraternity tied up a guy in a public park without any clothes and threw food at him, and put honey on him. Well, he had his boxer shorts on, and they put the key to the handcuffs in his shorts, but he was tied around the tree. The fraternity members then made his girlfriend come to get him and let him out."

Black fraternities appeared to be more accepting of dating relationships. In fact, most of the black fraternity members indicated that at least half of their fraternity brothers had steady girlfriends or fiancées. One black fraternity member stated, "About four or five fraternity brothers, out of fifteen, do not have steady girlfriends. Everybody [referring to the fraternity brothers] is always talking about how they need a lady. Talking to a lot of different girls is boring, stupid, and a waste of time." Overall, then, the black fraternities appeared to value or at least be supportive of steady dating relationships, whereas the white fraternities mostly discouraged them.

When asked about sexual harassment at their fraternities, both white and black members reported that it did not happen and was not acceptable. However, they often admitted being confused about what sexual harassment was. Women who attended white fraternity parties were likely to report various types of sexual harassment; women who attended black fraternity parties reported it far less frequently. One white man reported that his fraternity would not stand for sexual harassment, but later in the interview, he said, "I guess there are plenty of times where somebody will say something to a girl or whatever and she'll get mad and leave and a couple of guys will stand around and laugh or whatever." Another white fraternity member talked about an activity called "hogging," which is a competition to see who has to sleep with the fattest girl at the party.

When asked about a "typical" day in the fraternity, the white men reported talking about sex more than anything else. However, they also reported talking about drinking alcohol, sports, and sometimes classes. Black fraternity members were more likely to report that they talked about women or girls rather than sex per se. They also reported talking about classes, but unlike their white counterparts, the black respondents regularly discussed politics, personal problems, and problems on campus. When asked how the women who attended their parties were treated, one black fraternity member reported, "Very well. We treat them better than the guys that come through, because I mean, we're trying to raise money for legitimate causes and we feel that if you treat the

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women right, then women are going to tell a friend and they are going to tell a friend, and then more and more women are going to come than guys who come."

There was a strong notion of a double standard for men's and women's sexuality, prevalent in both black and white fraternities. Women who had sex with more than one member of the fraternity or who slept with a man the first night they met were "tramps," "sluts," or "hos." Many of our participants—both black and white—indicated that they wanted to marry "good girls." Both black men and black women discussed "groupies," described as female friends of the men who hung out with them a lot but were not necessarily their sexual partners. There was a certain amount of disdain for groupies by both black fraternity members and the black women who frequented their events. One black woman reported being somewhat horrified when another woman described her as a groupie; the woman went to the brothers in the fraternity to make sure that they did not see her as such. Following are two examples of how white fraternity members categorized women:

> You've got your sorority girls, nonsorority girls, and beer wenches. [What's that?] She's always there when there's free beer.
>
> OK, you've got the girls that are referred to probably as whores, and then you've got the psycho girls, the ones who I guess just leech onto you and no matter what you did you could do no wrong and it drove you nuts. . . . The whore is the one that'll go out and sit at the bar and if you schmooze her enough you'll be the next person to take her home. . . . Then there's the cool girls, those typically more involved in their sororities or campus activities. They might occasionally hook up, but they don't have a sexual history.

A black fraternity member contributed the following:

> Groupies are always around trying to build a reputation off of the frat's reputation. [Is it common for groupies to sleep with the brothers?] Um, I'm sure it has happened, but it's not that common. High-class are those women in which the frat brothers would just die to be with because of the way a woman looks, carries themselves—just fine womanhood. She has it all together. The chicken-heads are like groupies, yet they are not around you all of the time, constantly bothering you. They try to pretend that they know you.

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### NONSEXUAL PHYSICAL ABUSE

Nonsexual physical violence and aggression were found to be more prevalent in the black than the white fraternities. The nonsexual physical violence reported by participants was exclusively male-on-male abuse. One black fraternity member described male-on-male physical violence this way:

> INTERVIEWER: Do you recall any parties that ever got out of hand?
> RESPONDENT: House parties, no. But we have had parties at clubs that got out of hand. People tend to get jealous of certain individuals. If you're stepping around the parties and they don't like you, then they break your line. If someone does not like you because you're talking to a girl that used to be their lady, then fights get started. If a person is bored and has nothing else to do, then they will probably try to start a fight. We don't tend to have too many of those.

Male-on-male physical aggression also occurred in white fraternities. One white fraternity member talked about a party where two members got into a physical fight and had to be pulled apart by other members (he thought this was amusing), or how male nonmembers attending the party got into fights with each other. When this male-on-male aggression was between fraternity "brothers," whether black or white, it seemed ironic, given their pledges of loyalty and brotherhood.

Hazing appeared to be more common in black than white fraternities, which explains part of the racial differences in male-on-male aggression. As is typical when doing research on fraternities, it was somewhat difficult to get past the loyalty and confidentiality expected of members. As a result, most of our reports on hazing and male-on-male violence came from women who attended black fraternity parties. One white woman described hazing incidents in black fraternities that involved branding the back of the calf muscle or the upper back with a particular fraternity sign. A black woman who was not affiliated with a sorority reported, "Everybody goes through an initiation process [in the black fraternities] and they go through some things, but they make it through alright. After they become a member, then they understand that all of that [hazing] happens for a reason. If you want to become a doctor, then you go through a lot also. If you want to be in a frat bad enough, then you have to love it so you have to go through some of the trials and tribulations." There seemed to be a violent undertone to the secret hurdles the black pledges had to

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go through, and her explanation implies that the pain involved in pledging will lead to fraternal love and loyalty later.

A black fraternity member noted that although hazing is more predominant in black fraternities, drinking alcohol and date rape are more common in white fraternities:

> When you think of a keg party, you think of the *Revenge of the Nerds* or *Animal House* type of situations. But you don't find that at black Greek-letter organizations [BGLOs]. They're just two different cultures. In most cases, we have to take a three-point program on hazing, drugs and alcohol, and date rape. . . . In most cases and most studies, date rapes, alcohol abuse, have come in the nature of predominantly white organizations. Whereas, the hazing aspect or initiation aspect has been attributed to the historically black organizations. So I base it on a cultural thing. I don't see us [blacks] as wanting to get all involved in all of that date rape and things like that, or getting strongly involved with alcohol and drugs. The hazing aspect is known for us [BGLOs], not that that's good.

It was also common practice for black fraternity pledges to be psychologically and physically torn down. For instance, the Crossing Party appears to be the most emotionally charged party within the black fraternities. It involves attendance by fraternity members only and then the "beat-in" of the pledges as part of the initiation process. The beat-in is described as a ceremonial process—a "rite of passage"—whereby active fraternity members physically beat pledges. The purpose of the beat-in is to show allegiance to the fraternity. Following successful completion of the beat-in, the pledges become full members.

Another event that occurs within black fraternities is the Fraternity Auction, which involves the actual auctioning off of fraternity members to a crowd of people. The "going rate" for a member starts at $10, according to one black fraternity member. The highest bidder is granted a date with the fraternity member.

Psychological abuse commonly occurs in the "nickname" process in black fraternities. Most of the black men in our study disclosed their individual fraternity nicknames (which we do not disclose to preserve their anonymity), but these names were generally degrading. For instance, one member was given a nickname that mocked his heaviness and his dark skin tone. Most of the black fraternity members interviewed were ashamed of their personal nicknames and did not feel comfortable discussing the actual meaning of their nicknames

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due to embarrassment and humiliation. However, this nicknaming tradition varies by chapter and organization, and it is not always derogatory. For example, some chapters use Afrocentric nicknames, chosen for the purpose of empowering; these might be the names of Egyptian gods, Egyptian pharaohs, or other African names.

It is also important to address how the nature of these common "sports" in the black fraternities, such as branding, beat-ins, auctions, and nicknames, appear to pattern African Americans' slavery experience in U.S. history. On the one hand, these black fraternities serve as a haven of safety and respect that African Americans rarely experience on this largely white campus; on the other hand, many activities in the black fraternities directed toward their own members smack of internalized racism and even slavery. Surprisingly, this issue was never raised by any of the participants in our study.

Although not as prevalent as in the black fraternities, some hazing and other nonsexual physical violence were reported in the white fraternities. One white woman described a method of hazing: "One [white] fraternity, as part of pledging, blindfolded them [the pledges], took them to the stairs, and put a brick tied to a string in one hand and a pledge book in the other hand. The brick was also tied to the man's genitals. He was told that he has to choose which one to drop. If he drops the pledge book, he is out of the house. What he doesn't know is that the string on the brick is long enough to touch the floor without pulling on the guy's genitals." Two other white sorority women reported that white fraternities often force pledges to experience food deprivation, sleep deprivation, and personal hygiene deprivation.

Overall, the treatment of pledges by both black and white fraternity members appears to focus on demeaning behaviors, physical violence, and undertones of sexual violence (such as the string-tied-to-the-genitals initiation event). This is consistent with the findings reported by Sanday in her research on white pledge experiences.[41] In addition, there seems to be a process of tearing down individuality and replacing it with group identification and loyalty. O'Sullivan reports that the group identification that commonly takes place within fraternities excuses behavior that would not be acceptable if it were committed by an individual, such as hazing, fighting, or selling oneself.[42] Turner's research on the symbols and process of rituals, including hazing, indicates a "grinding down process" so that everyone is reduced to a homogeneous group through humiliation and physical punishment, but "then later positively refashioned into specific shapes compatible with their new postliminal duties and rights as incumbents of a new status and state." Turner goes on to state that these hum-

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bling and submission ordeals are part of the preparation for elitehood and a promise of "an extremely good time."[43]

### SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse of black women by black or white fraternity members was rare. However, white women reported that they experience significant levels of sexual abuse, including violent rape, by white fraternity members. This suggests that sexual abuse, particularly at the most extreme level (violent rape), is more common in the white fraternities. A pattern that emerged across race (and was also reported by the director of the Greek system) was the men's belief that of the few rape cases they knew about, the "victims" could not be trusted, and the charges were probably false. None of the black fraternity members reported knowing of anyone who had raped a woman, but they had heard of women being raped. All these cases involved acquaintance or date rape, and the general tenor was that the women were not to be believed.

In addition to sexual assault, "hooking up" appeared to be more common in the white fraternity setting. "Hooking up" is described as a process by which, usually after a considerable amount of alcohol consumption, a fraternity member has sex with a woman whom he has no interest in seeing again.[44] Although the majority of white and black men in this study believed that hooking up is harmless, the women in this study frequently viewed hooking up as a form of deception, humiliation, and degradation. We concluded that hooking up is often sexually exploitative, in that it is based on false promises and pretenses. More specifically, the women often felt betrayed because they thought the men they had hooked up with were genuinely interested in dating them, but soon realized that the men viewed their encounters as simply sexual conquests.

Women who interacted with white fraternities were very familiar with incidents of rape. *All the women in this study who interacted with white fraternities reported knowing someone personally who had been raped by a white fraternity member.* A white former sorority member stated, "Almost every girlfriend I have, or girl that I know, has been in a situation where they have been drinking and hooked up with a fraternity guy that is sexually aggressive. They will either do something that they do not want to do, like have sex, or do something else . . . like . . . that will make him relieve his sexual tension or whatever." In contrast, *none of the women who interacted with black fraternities reported knowing anyone who had been raped by a black fraternity member.* This does not mean that sexual assaults do not occur in black fraternities.

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Most of the women who interacted with black fraternities appeared to be protective of them. For instance, most of these women indicated that sexual harassment, sexism, and rape were not problems in black fraternities. One black woman reported, "I have not heard of any [sexual assault] cases in black fraternities. . . . The white frats keep everything so well hidden and secretive that I would not know about a rape even if it had happened. [What about date rape?] I don't think that black frats would go for that. I mean, no one wants to go to jail. They're good guys. They may get into trouble for little things, but they wouldn't do anything so stupid as to rape someone."

Moreover, another black woman reported feeling societal and cultural pressure to say no to sex, even if she wanted to say yes, so as not to seem like a "freak" (promiscuous). Stated another way, this woman felt that it was unacceptable for a woman to communicate a desire to have sex with a man, because doing so would make her appear "loose."

Both black and white fraternity men tended to report that rapes did not happen in their fraternities. However, some of their responses were telling, in terms of being reluctant to call various incidents rape but clearly wondering about the ethics. One white fraternity member said, "Girls come in the house and . . . once the party gets going on, they totally will drink a couple of beers and just be hanging onto every guy in the place, and just go from one to one to one to one. The other girls are still in their little group with the same guys. Girls that bounce around, everybody knows it, too, what's going on. People take advantage of it. But I wouldn't classify it as rape."

During interviews with black fraternity members, some sexist remarks were made, and incidents that sounded like rape were described. One black fraternity member stated, "Alcohol is a social drink, so you tend to relax more when you get drunk. Sex comes about really easy when you get drunk. You get horny automatically. I have heard of some girls that have had some outlandish shit done to them at parties. One that stands out in my mind was when a fraternity brother had sex with a female in the woods, so he got named 'Woodsy.'" When asked how men felt about women who hooked up (sexually), another black fraternity member replied, "the terminology that guys use is that 'I hit that bitch!'"

Alternatively, another black fraternity member stated that rape is and should be particularly repugnant to blacks: "It [rape] shouldn't happen. It's a horrible thing. It shouldn't happen to anyone, but if it were to happen to a black woman, then I would be totally outraged because black women have been raped for too long and it's painful to hear of whites raping black women. But to see a brother rape a sister, I can't even explain the feeling that I have."

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Similarly, another black male respondent stated, "I hope that there is no individual in our organization that is perverted enough to try to rape somebody." Another claimed that although women sometimes get very drunk at their parties, the main issue is, "How in the hell are we going to get her home?"

Despite the significant number of rapes at white fraternities reported by the women in our study, white fraternity members seemed oblivious, ignorant, or unconcerned. For example, one member said, "I've never personally known anyone who's been raped, so it's just never been a big topic." One white fraternity member who reported that his fraternity was "safe" for women stated that he would not be worried about his sister attending one of his fraternity parties, as long as his fraternity brothers knew that she was his sister; otherwise, he might be worried.

In sum, although sexual misconduct, such as sexual harassment and hooking up under false pretenses, appeared to occur in the black fraternities, sexual violence appeared to be more prevalent in the white fraternities. It is important to note that sexual aggression and rape were not always intraracial. A black woman interviewed in our study, who had interacted with both black and white fraternities, reported, "There is a predominantly white fraternity on campus that made a point that every single fraternity brother had to go out and find a black woman, have some kind of sexual relations with her, and report it to the fraternity brothers." In fact, this particular woman was the only participant who reported being a survivor of a fraternity rape; she had been raped by a white fraternity man at a white fraternity party.

It is important to note that our findings were similar to Boswell and Spade's,[45] in that there were distinctions among the white fraternities in the level of reported drinking, the sexist nature of events and parties, and the reputation for being low, medium, or high risk in terms of rape. Whereas the low-risk fraternities had parties with themes such as "Halloween," "Karaoke," or "Jimmy Buffet," the high-risk fraternities had parties and events with sexist themes (as previously discussed). Not surprisingly, those white fraternities with the strongest alcohol and sexist cultures were also the ones with the highest reported risk for rape in our study.

## Conclusions

This study adds to the existing literature by including both historically black and predominantly white fraternities in the sample. There were four impor-

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tant points identified in our study. First, structural differences played a major role in the distinctions between black and white fraternities. All predominantly white fraternities own fraternity houses, which provide privacy and seclusion; these fraternities are thus less visible and not exposed to formal supervision. In contrast, black fraternities cannot afford fraternity houses, which means that parties and other social gatherings generally take place in public settings, such as on campus or in rented halls. Black fraternities are therefore more visible, their activities are officially monitored, and they are officially held accountable for their behavior. It is difficult to determine whether this official supervision of black fraternities is due to institutional (or structural) racism or individual racist responses by university and criminal justice officials. It seems reasonable to question whether the stricter application of rules and penalties for violations directed at black fraternity members (compared with white fraternity members) is a result of blacks' being unable to "hide" rule infractions in their own houses, university officials' willingness to excuse the illegal behavior of whites in exchange for payments from rich alumni, officials' tendency to respond more formally and intrusively to blacks than to whites, or some combination of these factors. What is clear is that, overall, during parties, white fraternities can consume alcohol and drugs, play loud music, have access to bedrooms, and behave in a sexually aggressive manner in the privacy of their own houses, whereas black fraternity parties are formally supervised, which makes each fraternity member more accountable for his own behavior and that of his brothers and others.

Second, black and white fraternities do not interact on any level (although blacks sometimes pledge white fraternities, and a few blacks attend white fraternity functions). Fraternity parties are almost completely segregated. The fraternity recruitment process generally targets individuals of one race, and there is little diversity in fraternity membership. For example, it is uncommon for blacks to join white fraternities and unheard of for whites to join black fraternities. In general, racism is downplayed and normalized within the white fraternity culture. It is important to emphasize that the historical formation of black and white fraternities, as well as the explanations for their continued existence, varies drastically. The white fraternities serve to empower an already powerful group on campus: white, often wealthy, males. The black fraternities serve to empower an often powerless group on campus: African American men, who report serious as well as subtle hostility due to their race. Although there was no indication that the white fraternities are helpful to others outside of their membership, the black respondents, both men and women, reported ways

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that the black fraternities are an important force in "lifting up" blacks on this racist campus.

Third, sexual assaults were more commonly reported in predominantly white fraternities than in black fraternities. A possible explanation is that the white fraternities have private houses, which allows them access to secluded areas, such as bedrooms. Sexually abusive behavior in black fraternities seemed to be less common. It is important to note that this finding does not allow us to assume that black and white fraternities behave differently due to cultural values or beliefs. However, it does suggest that the structural differences between black and white fraternities permit the white fraternities to behave in ways that the black fraternities cannot. Because black fraternities are extremely marginalized on this largely white campus, an important area for future research would be to study the sexual behavior of fraternity members at historically black campuses, to determine whether there is a difference between black fraternities on white campuses and black fraternities on black campuses.

Fourth, nonsexual physical violence appeared to be more common in black fraternities than in white fraternities. This took the form of both hazing and fighting at fraternity parties, often caused by jealousy over a woman. Black fraternities seemed to be subjected to more formal disciplinary actions for hazing and physical confrontations, which could be attributed to the high visibility of black fraternity events with official supervision. White fraternities also engaged in hazing; however, this usually took place in private settings, making it less detectable. Both black and white fraternities hazed for similar purposes: to diminish individuality and to create fraternity loyalty.[46]

It is interesting that men in white fraternities were more likely to "do gender" (or assert their masculinity) by dominating women, often sexually, whereas the black fraternity members were more likely to "do gender" through hazing and other male-on-male abuse.[47] Perhaps this racial difference in the gender of who is dominated can be explained by Messner's work on masculinity and sports; that is, the fraternity (like sports) offers bonding with other males that allows respect as well as a sense of brotherhood.[48] The black participants in this study clearly described a racially hostile campus, which was backed up by many of the statements by the white respondents. It is possible that the hazing process, though unacceptable behavior, allows these black men to "do masculinity" in the only way they can on largely white campuses. Majors describes U.S. black men living in a society where the credo is "a man's castle is his home," but black men frequently have no home or castle to protect.[49] In some sense, this is analogous to not having a fraternity house. According to Majors, the

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black man's adaptation is the "cool pose," or various attitudes and actions that are "mechanisms for survival, defense and social competence."[50] This can be applied to the hazing in black fraternities: "Being cool, illustrated in its various poses and postures, becomes a very powerful and necessary tool in the Black man's constant fight for his soul. The poses and postures of cool guard preserve and protect his pride, dignity and respect to such an extent that the Black male is willing to risk a great deal for it. One Black man said it well: 'The White man may control everything about me—that is, except my pride and dignity. That he can't have.'"[51]

Although the original goal of this study was to address whether there are racial differences in sexual abuse between white and black fraternities, our interviews resulted in other findings. First, we found a Greek and a campus system where white privilege runs rampant, and black students and fraternity members face countless forms of racism. Predominantly white campuses must do a better job to ensure racial equality both within and outside of the Greek system. White fraternities need to be subject to the same monitoring that black fraternities face. Finally, the aggression perpetrated by fraternity members—whether sexual, verbal, or physical, and whether directed at males or females, members or nonmembers—needs to be addressed without racial bias and in a consistent and fair manner.

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5. Most of the research on the Greek system, particularly regarding alcohol and sexual abuse, is conducted on white fraternities and sororities, and the researchers typically report their findings on "the Greek system" without recognizing the omission of the black Greek-letter organizations from their studies. In the following review of the literature, we specify "white" repeatedly, although the studies themselves tend to refer to the white Greek system as "the" Greek system.

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# 14

# How Black Greek-Letter Organization Membership Affects College Adjustment and Undergraduate Outcomes

*Shaun R. Harper, Lauretta F. Byars, and Thomas B. Jelke*

College attendance and degree attainment typically afford young women and men access to professional career opportunities, economic stability, and social networks with educated others. Graduates are more likely than those who do not pursue postsecondary education to assume leadership positions in their communities, the workplace, and professional organizations; this is especially true for advanced degree holders. Conversely, those who decide against college participation or choose to withdraw before graduation typically face economic hardship, limited career advancement, and few societal leadership opportunities. Given this and the opportunity gaps that currently exist among different racial and ethnic groups in the United States, it is vital that access to postsecondary education be increased for African Americans and other minorities. It is especially critical that students of color be offered resources and support to aid in their transition to and performance in college, thereby increasing their chances of graduating and enjoying the aforementioned benefits of college completion. Access without positive outcomes and the acquisition of transferable gains is virtually meaningless, as are career and leadership opportunities without the experience and practical know-how to perform important tasks well.

This chapter focuses on the positive effects of black Greek-letter organization (BGLO) membership on African American undergraduates. Much has been written separately about the topics of students' adjustment to college[1] and the effects of membership in sororities and fraternities.[2] However, literature focusing specifically on the relationship between BGLO membership and college adjustment, and outcomes for African American undergraduates is scarce. Thus, the ultimate aim of this chapter is to fill that void by drawing on



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multiple related sources. A review of relevant literature regarding college adjustment and the African American student experience at different types of institutions is followed by a synthesis of existing research on outcomes for BGLO members.

## Adjustment to College

The transition to college can provide students with opportunities for growth, identity exploration, cognitive development, and a sense of autonomy and independence. It can also cause a great deal of stress due to environmental change, social and academic difficulties, detachment and loneliness, and family separation.[3] Upcraft and coauthors suggest that the first year of college, particularly the initial six to eight weeks, is critical to students' adjustment to the new environments where they will live, learn, and grow for four or more years.[4] Historically, adjustment has been narrowly perceived as the immediate period following a student's transition from high school to college. In the context of this chapter, however, college adjustment is considered an ongoing process by which African American students are oriented to and become comfortable with their postsecondary living and learning environments.

Adjustment in the traditional sense is highly individualized, and studies typically examine the effects of the university environment and resources on the outcomes of individual college students. It is difficult to determine the initial impact of sorority and fraternity affiliation on individual African American students, however, because most BGLOs do not allow freshmen to seek membership. Thus, BGLOs have a somewhat delayed effect on student adjustment, beginning in the sophomore year and later. Kimbrough and Hucheson found that BGLOs were largely responsible for planning the social programs for African American students on predominantly white campuses.[5] At many institutions, these social programs have a broad, community-wide effect on the adjustment of African American newcomers. Without them, first-year students of color would have fewer social activities, thus negatively impacting their social satisfaction and the college adjustment process.

Academic success and personal development are cornerstones of the adjustment process. A student needs to be academically stable and personally comfortable in order to adjust successfully to college. The literature on the college adjustment process generally focuses on two areas: individual factors contributing to or predicting college adjustment, and environmental factors

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that foster smooth transitions. Various studies have shown significant links between adjustment to college and individual factors such as problem-solving skills,[6] standardized test scores, emotional stability,[7] and self-esteem.[8] The literature dealing with environmental variables has shown a positive correlation between social support and psychoemotional adaptation to college.[9] The receipt of consistently positive messages from peers, faculty, and staff confirms for an undergraduate student that she or he belongs in college and has the capacity to do well. Conversely, a lack of recognition for individual talents and contributions, failed attempts at making friends, difficulty establishing meaningful relationships with faculty and staff, perceptions of few socially satisfying options outside of the classroom, and the inability to find one's niche in the institutional environment can complicate the college adjustment process and may lead to poor academic performance and attrition.[10]

An environmental component that is related to student support is social integration. Social integration has been linked to such adjustment factors as academic success, satisfaction with college, persistence, and graduation.[11] That is, the more students are integrated into the life and activities of the campus, the more likely they are to graduate and achieve favorable outcomes. This is problematic for African American students at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), because integration typically requires assimilation into a white culture and participation in mainstream activities that are incongruent with their own unique histories and cultural preferences.[12] BGLOs have been integral providers of social and cultural integration and are therefore able to positively influence African American students' adjustment to college.

Active involvement both inside and outside the classroom has also been shown to positively affect college adjustment. Astin defines student involvement as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience."[13] The theory of student involvement is principally concerned with how college students spend their time and the ways in which various institutional processes and opportunities facilitate student development. "The extent to which students can achieve particular developmental goals is a direct function of the time and effort they devote to activities designed to produce these gains."[14] This theory also suggests that student time is the most precious resource during the college years, and how students spend that time affects their adjustment to and experiences in college.

Given the diversity in racial and ethnic backgrounds that exists on many contemporary college and university campuses, as well as gaps in high school preparation among first-year undergraduate students, special attention must

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be paid to adjustment stressors and facilitators for different groups of students, including African Americans. Although many published studies provide insight into the college adjustment process, few focus specifically on African American students. The research that does exist clearly shows that the adjustment process for African American students at PWIs and at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is dramatically different.

## PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

The racism, academic difficulty, isolation, loneliness, environmental incompatibility, cultural incongruence, and confrontations with white students and instructors that many African American students face at PWIs has been well documented in the higher education literature.[15] Consequently, the college adjustment process is often more cumbersome for African American and other minority students than it is for white undergraduates. This is particularly true of PWIs that enroll low percentages of racial or ethnic minority students and offer few venues and organizations for the recognition, exploration, and celebration of black culture and interests.

Smedley and coauthors identified the following stresses for first-year racial or ethnic minority students during the adjustment process at PWIs: social climate, interracial relations, racism and discrimination, within-group interactions and perceptions, and achievement concerns.[16] These factors negatively impacted the academic performance and psychological well-being of underrepresented students on predominantly white campuses. According to Allen, African American students who attend PWIs are immersed in a cultural environment that is different from their own and struggle to overcome their feelings of exclusion.[17] Additionally, encounters with racism and prejudicial acts prevent many African American students from getting involved on campus, thus precluding them from the aforementioned benefits during their adjustment to PWIs. Eimers contends that "minority students may be less likely to get involved because they have a more difficult time identifying with a critical mass of peers with whom they feel comfortable."[18] In fact, the college adjustment experience is considerably better for African American students who embed themselves in same-race peer support groups and student organizations at PWIs.[19]

*Black Student Organizations at PWIs.* During the adjustment process, some African American students find comfort and social support by getting involved

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with BGLOs and other black-oriented programs and student organizations on predominantly white campuses.[20] These organizations provide an outlet and a safe haven for African American students to comfortably engage in culturally common practices. After spending the majority of the day being the only African American, or one of only a few African Americans, in class, these students find much-needed solace and support from their same-race peers in black student organizations and at predominantly black social events.

Although African American student participation in predominantly white campus organizations has increased in recent years, predominantly black clubs and minority student organizations remain the primary venues for involvement among African American undergraduates. Involvement in black student unions, gospel choirs, undergraduate NAACP chapters, and academic clubs for African Americans (e.g., National Society of Black Accountants, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Black Engineers) is typical for African American students at PWIs; their participation in student government, campus activity boards, marching band, and resident assistant programs remains strikingly low. Again, having spent the majority of their time being underrepresented in the classroom, few students of color are willing to commit their out-of-class social time to organizations where they are also grossly underrepresented.

A recent study by Watson and associates reported that "many institutions are coming to the realization that they are inadequately prepared to understand the learning and developmental needs of racial, cultural, linguistic minorities."[21] Consequently, many African American students find themselves in an environment that is not conducive to a smooth transition or to success. According to Rice-Mason, racial and ethnic minority students are often overwhelmed on predominantly white campuses, a problem that is traceable to the incongruity between their expectations of the university environment and their actual experiences.[22] The impact of an institution on its students is mediated through the many subgroups that exist on the campus. BGLOs are examples of subgroups that play a major role in facilitating college adjustment for their members by providing a strong social support network that helps reverse the plight of social alienation and provides opportunities for cultural expression. Since their inception, BGLOs have helped their members negotiate their place in predominantly white learning environments.

*Black Sororities and Fraternities at PWIs.* Historically, BGLOs have been influential in shaping the social, cultural, and academic experiences of African

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American students on predominantly white college campuses. Although two-thirds of the organizations were founded at HBCUs, BGLOs have significantly impacted the college adjustment of African American students at PWIs by satisfying an enormous social need. The first black college fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, was founded in 1906 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, as a support group for the few African Americans attending the university at the time. Five years later, in the wake of racial hostility, ten academically successful African American undergraduate men at Indiana University started Kappa Alpha Psi. The founders sought to afford members the opportunity to build something previously lacking on the predominantly white campus—meaningful relationships and opportunities to connect with other African Americans outside of class. Crump asserts:

> Black men were almost completely ignored by White students. To make matters worse, one Black student might be on campus for weeks without seeing another. Under these circumstances, assimilation into the life of the school was impossible. The administration maintained an attitude of indifference as Blacks were slowly matriculated and swiftly forgotten . . . the members of [Kappa Alpha Psi] sought one another's company between classes and dropped by one another's lodging place to discuss a new approach to an old problem. The depressing isolation earlier experienced was relieved as new friendships solidified.[23]

The founding of Sigma Gamma Rho on the campus of Butler University yielded similar social gains and significantly enhanced the college adjustment process of African American women in an environment where they were (and continue to be) woefully underrepresented. Contemporary studies involving African American students like the Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, and Sigma Gamma Rho founders, whose experiences were dramatically altered because of involvement in a BGLO on a predominantly white campus, are scarce.

In Sutton and Kimbrough's study of African American undergraduates, 47.3 percent of the participants were BGLO members and showed signs of successful academic adjustment, as determined by grade point average (GPA).[24] Similarly, 40 percent of the high-achieving African American undergraduate men in Harper's 2003 study held membership in a historically black fraternity and cited BGLOs as a valuable source of peer support during the college adjustment process.[25] Many of the fraternity men said that their chapter brothers were largely responsible for their persistence and success at their respective

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PWIs, and they recognized the cadre of African American male peers who they had bonded with, confided in, and depended on in times of stress and need. They recalled the support they had received from their fellow members when they sought major campus positions, as well as when they faced economic and academic hardships on their predominantly white campuses.

### HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Several researchers have compared various components of African American students' experiences at PWIs with those of African American undergraduates at HBCUs.[26] These comparative studies overwhelmingly indicate that HBCUs offer better learning environments and support systems for African American students, despite their limited and sometimes meager financial resources. As noted earlier, two-thirds of the BGLOs were founded on historically black campuses. They continue to have a significant presence at these institutions and a profound impact on the adjustment of many African American students.

In one of the most frequently cited comparative studies on African American students, Fleming examined the experiences of 1,529 undergraduates from seven HBCUs and 1,062 students from eight PWIs. Results revealed that HBCU students adjusted to college more easily and acquired the skills needed to function effectively in the larger society after college: motivation, confidence, high aspirations, and the ability to thrive in competition. Furthermore, Fleming found that undergraduates at HBCUs were more likely than their same-race peers at PWIs to build relationships with one another, receive support and recognition from faculty, and acquire the help they needed to overcome achievement-related deficiencies during the adjustment process. Above all, the positive social environment at HBCUs was highlighted in Fleming's study. Her analysis included confirmation that African American students felt a sense of connectedness, power, and affiliation on black campuses, which impacted their cognitive development and motivation to succeed.[27]

Similarly, Allen reported that African American students at HBCUs had higher grades, felt more supported and socially satisfied, were less likely to consider withdrawing from school, and had more favorable relations with white faculty than their counterparts at PWIs.[28] Additionally, he concluded that African American students at HBCUs displayed greater psychosocial, academic, and cognitive gains; stronger cultural awareness and commitment; loftier educational and career aspirations; and higher degrees of satisfaction with college

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than did African American students enrolled elsewhere. Allen contends that African American students at HBCUs "purchase psychological well-being, cultural affinity, nurturing academic relations, and happiness at the cost of limited physical facilities, fewer resources, and more restricted academic programs."[29]

BGLOs indisputably enhance the social fabric of HBCUs and positively impact the college adjustment experiences of undergraduate students. Although they do not have to contend with campus racism, isolation, and underrepresentation, African American undergraduates at HBCUs, much like their counterparts at PWIs, need a place where they can become leaders and feel a sense of belonging. BGLOs, by nature of their long-standing historical functions, continue to provide that highly sought after venue for social connectivity among African American students. This is especially true on HBCU campuses, where African American students are more concentrated and BGLO chapters are larger.[30]

Sutton and Kimbrough noted that African American participation in student government is usually higher at HBCUs than at PWIs, but involvement in other black student groups is typically lower.[31] Greek-letter organizations are the exception here, as more HBCU students participate in sororities and fraternities than in student government associations. Consequently, a greater portion of African American students' college adjustment experiences and outcomes at HBCUs are more significantly enhanced.[32]

## Student Outcomes

The impact of student organization participation has been well noted in numerous empirical studies during the past thirty years. Several scholars have identified a wide range of gains and positive outcomes associated with involvement in academically purposeful and socially meaningful in-class and out-of-class activities, clubs, and organizations. For example, Pascarella and Terenzini posit that active involvement in out-of-class activities and the nature and quality of students' social interactions with peers and faculty have a positive influence on persistence, educational aspirations, completion of a bachelor's degree, and subsequent enrollment in graduate school.[33]

Additional research has found that involvement positively impacts cognitive and intellectual skill development,[34] adjustment to college,[35] moral and ethical development,[36] psychosocial development and positive self-image,[37]

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interpersonal skills and competence,[38] and persistence rates.[39] In *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research,* Pascarella and Terenzini conclude that students are highly likely to receive returns on the investments they make in their educational experiences through in-class and out-of-class involvement, which includes sororities and fraternities.[40] Similarly, Kuh and colleagues conclude, "The research is unequivocal: students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from college than those who are not so involved."[41]

Again, sororities and fraternities continue to be the primary source of involvement for African American undergraduates. On some campuses, the absence of black sororities and fraternities leaves African American students with few or no outlets for culturally familiar interaction and social participation.[42] In addition to the aforementioned gains and outcomes associated with involvement, BGLO membership yields a unique cache of other outcomes for African American students. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to examining gains and outcomes in four domains: academic achievement and cognitive development, leadership development, racial identity development, and practical competence.

## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Historically, BGLOs have included scholastic achievement and intellectualism in their missions and statements of principles. Giddings describes the intensity of academic competition and the seriousness with which members of the black sororities approached scholastic achievement during their early years at Howard University.[43] Today, scholarship and intellectual prowess are espoused in catalogs, on Web sites, and in the recruitment brochures used by the nine national BGLOs, which remind current members and aspirants alike of the role of academics in undergraduate chapters. There is mixed evidence, however, about how membership in a Greek-letter organization actually affects the academic achievement and cognitive development of members.

Pascarella and associates found that fraternity membership had a negative effect on some areas of cognitive development, specifically mathematical reasoning, critical thinking, composite scores, and reading comprehension. This did not apply, however, to the African American fraternity men in the sample. Despite the overall negative pattern, black fraternity membership actually had a slightly positive effect.[44] A second study by Flowers, Pascarella, and Whitt found that the aforementioned negative effects were not consistently distrib-

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uted throughout the participants' college careers. The authors concluded that the widely assumed negative *cognitive* effects of Greek affiliation occur largely during the first year of college.[45] Since most BGLOs do not admit first-year students, one can conclude that they have no negative effect and may positively impact the cognitive development of African American students who join during or after the sophomore year. Kuh and coauthors' research supports this claim. Their study showed that BGLO membership led to positive gains in cognitive complexity, knowledge acquisition, and knowledge application for African American men.[46] Although there are no specific studies reporting positive gains for African American women, it is likely that the results would apply to them as well.

Pike and Askew examined the effects of sorority and fraternity affiliation on the academic experiences of undergraduate women and men. They found that members exerted greater academic effort, participated more often in clubs and student organizations, and had higher levels of interaction with other students than their unaffiliated peers at the same institutions. However, they found that the fraternity men's GPAs were lower than those of unaffiliated male students, and that the grades of sorority members were not significantly different from those of unaffiliated women.[47]

Although all BGLOs espouse a commitment to academic excellence, claims that membership in these organizations enhances academic performance are often unfounded. For BGLOs, as is the case with most social sororities and fraternities, academic performance is measured by academic standings reports produced by campus Greek life offices and offices of institutional research. These reports display the average end-of-semester grades for all active and new members in a given chapter, providing the chapters and the institution with an indication of how they are doing in comparison to other Greek-letter organizations on campus. According to Harper, "semester grade reports validate perceptions—be they positive or negative—about the impact fraternity/sorority involvement has on student scholastic achievement."[48] He found that BGLOs typically fell in the bottom tier of all sororities and fraternities listed on official academic standings reports retrieved from multiple PWIs in different parts of the country. Upon analyzing data from 24 institutions and 119 BGLO undergraduate chapters, Harper discovered that nearly 92 percent of all the BGLO chapters had GPAs well below the all-Greek averages, which included all social fraternities and sororities (not just BGLOs) on the campuses. Only 7 percent of the BGLOs had GPAs either at or above the university-wide, all-undergraduate averages. The mean GPAs for the black sororities and fra-

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ternities were 2.54 and 2.43, respectively. Harper noted that several explanations could account for the meager academic performance of BGLO members, including excessive program and chapter commitments, extreme involvement in other organizations, too much time devoted to step show preparation, hazing, a lack of organization-specific resources offered by national headquarters, and poor advising from Greek life offices. Additionally, the previously discussed challenges faced by African American students at PWIs also yield unfavorable outcomes for BGLO members. Participation in a sorority or fraternity, unfortunately, does not ensure African American students immunity from acts of racial insensitivity on predominantly white campuses or feelings of underrepresentation and isolation in classroom environments that lack racial and ethnic diversity. Hence, they too are vulnerable to academic and social disengagement, which leads to below-average academic performance.

Despite these challenges, many of the activities in which BGLO members participate may positively affect cognitive development. For instance, studies have shown that service learning (intentional learning and volunteering) has a positive effect on several academic factors, including higher grades, more time devoted to class preparation, heightened academic self-concept, desire to attend graduate school, and greater general and disciplinary knowledge.[49] It also should be noted that academic success can be measured by more than just a composite chapter GPA. Other factors might include the number of members elected to honor societies and qualifying for scholarships or the development and use of chapter programs for academic improvement. Unfortunately, few data are available to verify how BGLO members rank on these dimensions. Finally, an indirect link can be made between leadership development, membership in BGLOs, and cognitive development. Leadership responsibilities have been connected to growth in cognitive complexity as well as other factors, such as practical competence and interpersonal gains.[50] BGLOs provide a host of leadership development opportunities, which are discussed in the next section.

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

"He is no longer a single African American male struggling to survive on a college campus. Rather, he has become part of a legacy of leadership and success"[51] This legacy of leadership and success described by Branch is one to which many BGLO members gain access once they graduate from college. It is not at all coincidental that many of the most celebrated and influential African American leaders held or currently hold membership in one of the nine

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BGLOs—Dr. Martin Luther King, Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, Jesse Jackson, Rosa Parks, Johnnie Cochran, Dr. Johnetta B. Cole, Senator Carol Moseley Braun, Tavis Smiley, Congresswoman Julia Carson, W. E. B. DuBois, and Maya Angelou, to name a few. Trend data suggest that many of the most successful African Americans in the country are members of BGLOs. For instance, in a study of African American female college presidents and chief executive officers, Sanford-Harris found that most participants were actively involved in one of the four historically black sororities.[52]

According to Patton and Bonner, "In line with their stated missions, historically black Greek-letter sororities have consistently provided an environment where African American women could participate in community service, build friendships and develop leadership skills separate and distinct from White male, White female or even Black male cohorts."[53] Women and men alike have cultivated and displayed these leadership skills on their campuses, in community service, and in their postcollegiate educational and career endeavors. Giddings further notes, "The sorority has always been an important source of leadership training for Black women, whose opportunities to exercise such skills in formal organizations are few."[54] College sororities and fraternities provide African Americans a platform on which to acquire the practical competencies requisite for entry into progressive social and professional circles. Members not only gain access but also often assume leadership roles in those arenas.

At PWIs, the leadership development opportunities afforded to African American students by BGLOs are especially essential for their persistence, satisfaction, and academic performance. Kimbrough and Hutcheson's study on the impact of BGLO membership on African American student involvement in collegiate activities and leadership development revealed that BGLO members were more involved in campus activities and organizations and generally had more confidence in their abilities to perform several leadership-related skills than did unaffiliated African American students.[55]

Davis found that African Americans who were involved in student organizations at PWIs were more satisfied with their undergraduate experiences and considered dropping out of school less frequently than did their uninvolved counterparts. There are also data to suggest that involvement and leadership directly affect African American students' performance in the classroom.[56] For instance, Jackson and Swan found that performance gains increased significantly as African American student leaders became more involved on their campuses—their grades were higher, they were more alert in class and more

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interested in learning, and they felt better about themselves and their academic abilities.[57]

Sutton and Kimbrough found that minority student organizations, especially BGLOs, remain primary venues for African American students' out-of-class involvement at PWIs. The authors assert that membership in these organizations affords African American students a sense of belonging, cultural connections, and numerous opportunities to gain transferable leadership and communication skills.[58] These claims are consistent with earlier findings by Kimbrough regarding African American students on a predominantly white campus: "The respondents believed that black-dominated organizations were more likely to provide leadership opportunities than white-dominated ones."[59]

Kimbrough's 1995 study also found that BGLO members overwhelmingly attributed the development of their leadership skills to the sorority and fraternity chapters with which they were affiliated. He reported that BGLO members were more likely than unaffiliated African American students to hold membership and multiple leadership positions in other campus clubs, including mainstream student organizations. All sixty-one participants in the study were affiliated with the black Greek council, the black student association, or the black gospel choir on their predominantly white campus. Ninety-three percent of those participating in the study, Greeks and non-Greeks alike, characterized themselves as leaders and believed that they had gained transferable leadership skills through their respective student organizations. Leadership experiences in BGLOs and other predominantly black groups also connect African American students to their same-race peers and strengthen their commitment to the advancement of the African American community, which in turn enhances their racial identities.[60]

## RACIAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Racial identity is "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group."[61] Specifically regarding racial identity development among African Americans, psychological Nigrescence theory became an area of interest for some researchers during the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s.[62] Nigrescence is a "resocializing experience" in which a preexisting identity is transformed from non-Afrocentrism to Afrocentrism to multiculturalism. The theory was originally based on a five-stage sequential model developed by

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William Cross in 1971 to explain identity development; the model was reduced to four stages in 1991: preencounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization.[63]

Parham and Helms's study found a relationship between the Cross model of Nigrescence and African American college student identity development. High self-esteem was found among those who were at the latter stages in the model. Having a positive perception of other African Americans, recognizing the inequities and injustices that plague African Americans and other marginalized groups, and being able to comfortably negotiate social relationships with people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds all contribute to the development of a strong racial identity.[64] BGLOs provide members with opportunities to grow in each of these areas. In fact, scholars have noted that, historically, promoting cultural awareness was a major focus of BGLOs, and it continues to be so today.[65] Branch asserts that many African American men "see the fraternal system as a means of reconnecting with their African social and cultural identity."[66] The same is undoubtedly true for African American women as well.

The focus on sisterhood and brotherhood, as well as the emphasis on collectivism versus individualism, affords BGLO members the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with other African Americans. "Kinship with other oppressed peoples (including non-Blacks) is felt, as the egocentric 'I' perspective is replaced with a collective 'we' identity."[67] Also, BGLOs are often cited for their acceptance of civic responsibility and commitment to community service. One thing that is often overlooked, however, is that members' volunteer efforts focus almost exclusively on helping other African Americans. This speaks volumes about BGLO members' commitment to eradicating the socioeconomic and sociopolitical plight of others of their race. As previously mentioned, BGLO members are likely to be involved in other campus organizations as well. Participation in non-Greek-related clubs and activities affords members the opportunity to forge working relationships and engage in cross-cultural interactions with peers from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. These exchanges enable BGLO members to negotiate relationships with the culturally different, while remaining attuned to their own identities and committed to black issues.

Taylor and Howard-Hamilton's study examined the relationship between racial identity and student organization membership among African American men.[68] Data collected from undergraduate students at ten PWIs suggested that higher levels of involvement contributed to higher levels of racial identity.

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Specifically, highly involved students tended to be at the immersion-emersion and internalization stages in Cross's model, while less-involved participants reported higher levels of preencounter attitudes. Moreover, results from fraternity men in the sample supported the researchers' hypothesis that BGLO members would be more involved in student organizations. Consequently, members showed higher levels of immersion-emersion and internalization attitudes than did their unaffiliated counterparts. "Regarding fraternity involvement, these findings suggest that African American males who participate in Greek-letter organizations tend to embrace a stronger, more positive sense of self-esteem and racial identity than their non-Greek counterparts."[69] Taylor and Howard-Hamilton provide the following conclusion:

> These findings counter the impression that because African American males, as well as others who are culturally different, are not seen in the major student organizations on campuses they are not involved. Involvement encompasses anything that enhances students' collegiate experience, including academic and interpersonal development. When an African American student has been exposed to a positive learning environment complemented by co-curricular programming with an Afrocentric emphasis, the outcome is a well-educated person with a sound grounding in the realities necessary for intelligent living in the next millennium.[70]

More recent scholars have noted gender differences in racial identity development among African American students on predominantly white campuses. In comparing the identity development of African American undergraduates who were members of BGLOs with that of non-BGLO members, O'Reilly found differences between women and men. Affiliation with a BGLO was a significant factor in identity development for female students but not for males. Moreover, African American sorority members scored significantly higher than unaffiliated women on the identity confidence subscale.[71]

Some researchers advocate the need to study the impact of organizations such as sororities or the NAACP on the racial identity of African American women separate from their impact on African American men, because women typically experience a bifurcation of their identity as ethnic group members and as women. According to Albert, black sororities and other organizations that affirm African American women are steeped in a tradition of challenging the status quo relative to race and gender, working to improve the quality of life for African Americans, and practicing social justice for African Americans

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in general and African American women in particular.[72] Her research found that women who were affiliated with black sororities and other organizations displayed significant differences in black identity and womanist identity than did women who were not affiliated. Albert found that this relationship "provides further support for the notion that social support, extracurricular activities, and peer camaraderie among black women who attend PWIs may help cultivate a development of a racial sense of self and less conservative views about women. In fact, affiliated women were twice as likely to self-identify as black feminists than were non-affiliated women."[73] These findings suggest that there is a need for further scholarly exploration of the impact of sorority membership on African American women. Also, both Albert and O'Reilly call for additional inquiry to better understand the role of sorority membership at the intersection of race and gender for African American women. Such studies also need to take into consideration the environmental conditions that contribute to differences, and how these factors might vary at an HBCU versus a PWI.

### PRACTICAL COMPETENCE

Practical competence refers to the portfolio of transferable skills acquired through a variety of in-class and out-of-class experiences that can be utilized in educational and career experiences beyond college. According to Kuh, Palmer, and Kish, "Success during and after college requires practical competence—the ability to identify and solve problems, manage time effectively, and make good decisions. Practical competence is a broad area that includes the above-mentioned attributes as well as leadership development and career choice."[74] These competencies not only allow college graduates to successfully compete for jobs and admission to top graduate and professional schools but also serve the greater good by equipping young men and women with the proficiency and understanding required for success and leadership in various roles.

Student organizations offer undergraduates a stage on which future roles are rehearsed, the concept of trial and error is understood, and mistakes are made and learned from. The African American undergraduates in Harper's study identified time management, the ability to work collaboratively with people from different backgrounds, persuasion and negotiation tactics, multitasking and delegating, and improved communication skills as some of the competencies they acquired through student organization membership.[75] Since BGLOs are the primary organizations with which African American students are involved, one can comfortably conclude that they are where most

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African American students gain practical competency and supplement their classroom learning experiences.

For example, the process of planning, promoting, rehearsing, and selling tickets for a step show exposes BGLO members to marketing and sales concepts. Similarly, debating and voting on important issues in chapter meetings increase members' ability to consider multiple points of view, navigate political situations, and respect political protocol. Recruiting and evaluating candidates for membership give BGLO members the experience needed to recognize the talent, potential, and gifts in others—a universal skill needed by every manager or leader in a business or professional organizational setting. Furthermore, balancing academic commitments, chapter meetings, program planning and execution, step show rehearsals, membership intake, and all the other duties associated with being an undergraduate BGLO member helps students prioritize, juggle multiple tasks, and delegate some of their workload to others. Anyone who has ever attended graduate school or served as a busy senior-level executive will confirm the necessity and usefulness of these skills. Additionally, holding a leadership position or simply being a general member who participates actively in chapter-related activities gives BGLO members a set of skills and experiences to market and use after graduation. These practical competencies typically serve them well for the rest of their lives, especially in professional work environments.

## Conclusion

BGLO membership indisputably enhances the college adjustment experience and offers an array of important outcomes to African American undergraduate students, although the impact may be slightly different, depending on whether they attend HBCUs or PWIs. At HBCUs, African American students tend to have a larger selection of social outlets and a more supportive environment that contributes positively to their social, cultural, and academic adjustment. At PWIs, BGLOs tend to be the primary source of involvement for African American undergraduates; sponsor most of the culturally appealing social activities that members and nonmembers alike come to enjoy; and provide a haven of sorts from the racism, isolation, and underrepresentation that African American students often experience. Regardless of the campus type, BGLO participation enhances students' integration into the life and social fabric of the university, thus improving their chances for retention and graduation.

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The nexus between BGLO membership and gains in academic achievement, cognitive development, leadership development, racial identity development, and practical competence has been well supported by the literature cited throughout this chapter. However, additional research is needed to more precisely and definitively assess the direct effects of BGLOs in these areas, especially in terms of matriculation at PWIs and at HBCUs. Future inquiries must also take into consideration the participation of African American sorority and fraternity members in other campus organizations and examine how BGLOs encourage wider campus involvement among their members. The strong public service record of BGLOs and their commitment to civic responsibility are also areas that interested researchers should explore with greater intensity. As colleges and universities become more focused on improving their retention and graduation rates, particularly in closing the gaps between white and African American students, they cannot overlook the important roles that BGLOs play in African American students' adjustment and success.

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# 15

# The Empty Space of African American Sorority Representation

## Spike Lee's *School Daze*

*Deborah Elizabeth Whaley*

Director Spike Lee established himself as a popular auteur and cultural icon in 1986 with the release of his film *She's Gotta Have It*. Lee thus has a great deal of cinematic credibility in the imaging of African American life. His 1988 film *School Daze* is the only major motion picture in which black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) are the central subject. The film thus operates almost entirely alone in representing African American college students and their Greek-letter organizations.[1] The film is also the subject of a book by Lee and *Village Voice* writer Lisa Jones, titled *Uplift the Race: The Construction of* School Daze.[2] The book provides a behind-the-scenes look at the making of the film; problems that arose in bringing it to theaters; production notes; anecdotal commentary by actors, crew members, and motion picture executives; and the original script. Taken together, the film and the book provide ample material to discuss from varying viewpoints a popular cultural product that has shaped the perception of BGLOs.

Lee presents two diametrically opposed views on culture and perceptions of self in *School Daze*: the haves and the have-nots. The haves are the Wannabee characters, beige- to light-brown-hued men and women who are members of two fictional organizations: the Gammites (fraternity) and the Gamma Rays (little sister sorority). The Gammites and Gamma Rays flaunt crass materialism, are politically (a)pathetic, are presented as a mimicry of white fraternal members, and spend the majority of their time engaging in unproductive hazing and pledging rituals. Lee calls the have-nots the Jigaboos. These dark-brown-hued college students are Afrocentric and politically focused; they commit their energy and activities to demanding that their college, the fictitious and historically black Mission College, financially divest from South Africa. *School*



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*Daze* explores the following question: In what ways do BGLOs, which claim to uplift their communities, find themselves trapped within their own color biases and class elitism, where the masses of African Americans suffer as a result?[3]

I propose that *School Daze* is a textual representation of African American sororities that begs for analysis. Lee does not disclose that his Wannabee characters, the women's sororal group the Gamma Rays, depict an actual African American sorority. Yet in his production notes, commentary suggests that the film's characters parallel two existing sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) and Delta Sigma Theta (DST). For example, Tisha Campbell, one of the actresses in *School Daze*, relates in *Uplift the Race* that she asked a member of DST about colorism in African American sororities and was told that "AKAs are Wannabees, that they always dressed [well] and they go around thinking they're better than other people." Campbell summarized the DST interview in the following way:

> The bond between [DST] seemed similar to the one the Jigaboos had. I asked them about Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated and how I could meet one. . . . The Deltas said AKAs will dick each other around [and that] . . . there's always jealously between them. I never got to talk to any of the AKAs. I did ask the Deltas, "Are all of you dark skinned?" And they said no. And I said, "Are all the AKAs light skinned?" They said yes. I guess we are divided that way.[4]

It is not too much of an interpretive leap to say that the text is suggestive of the perceived aesthetics of AKA and DST. *School Daze*, therefore, creates a cinematic lens to view these two organizations in terms of popular representation. For my analysis, I am interested mostly in the cultural work that *School Daze* performs and has the potential to perform. In other words, I consider what the representations in the film *do* and have the capability of *doing* in terms of dispersing the cultural and political ideologies of African American sororities. I analyze *School Daze* within the debates of popular culture while assessing the film's potential and its reception. I therefore work from the idea that consumers of popular culture encode and decode meanings differently and subjectively. As cultural critic Stuart Hall writes, consumers of popular culture generally approach such cultural products through a dominant, negotiated, or oppositional reading.[5] That is, a given spectator or reader may completely identify with the narrative put forth, negotiate the narrative with his or her own personal convictions and worldview, or resist or oppose the images

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and material and thereby not identify with the narrative at all. Readers and audiences may not question the underlying political ideologies in a given representation or may wholly agree with them, they may partially identify, or they may have to reconcile the contradictions among their belief systems, the subject's positions, and the desire to seek pleasure.

Although Lee's film is not entirely about African American sororities per se, he expresses his ideas about African American fraternal organizations most viciously through his female characters. I thus isolate key moments in *School Daze,* especially the musical number and the dramatic climax of the film, to illustrate how African American sorority women stand as symbols for the problems facing African American college communities. I begin by providing a close reading of important and representative moments of cultural, sexual, and gender politics in the film's narrative. Next, I rely heavily on Lee's production notes to provide insight into his filmic process. I end with a discussion concerning African American sororities and the politics of skin color and hair prejudice in the public sphere to address the contradictory politics of black femininity that the film attempts to illuminate.

## *School Daze* and the Social Construction of Femininity

*School Daze* is a cinematic statement on the cultural and economic climate of the late 1980s. It was filmed during the economic spoils and disfranchisement brought on by the Reagan-Bush era, wherein the upper middle class experienced economic surplus, the middle class was temporarily misled into economic and social stability until the onset of the recession under the presidency of George H. W. Bush, and the working class became increasingly alienated from the economic infrastructure of the nation.[6] Class is a shifting formation and is both perceptual and socioeconomic; it thus functions in culture as a social and material category of economic identity. The idea and the materiality of class form the backdrop for *School Daze,* where class is the signifier that separates the haves from the have-nots, and where color and Greek affiliation become a metonym for elitism and for toxic, counterproductive, upper-middle-class values. *School Daze* suggests that, in the 1980s, African America began to move farther away from the perceived radicalism of the 1960s, and that the core leadership in the community became inverted mirror images of conservative Reaganism.

The beginning of the film uses a montage shot: black-and-white still pho-

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tographs of Mission College appear on the screen while the Negro spiritual "I'm Gonna Find Me a Home" plays in the background. Each photograph depicts the growth of the institution, including its transformation from a small building to an academic conglomerate, ceremonial occasions, dignitaries (Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, and other male political leaders), commencement provocations, and 1960s sit-ins and protest marches. The music fades, the photographs dissolve and slowly fade to black, and the spectator sees the modern-day Mission College with a letter overlay that reads, "Mission College, founded in 1883, to *Uplift the Race.*" The spectator is then thrust into a modern-day protest, where one of the main protagonists, the brown-skinned Slice, leads a protest rally in support of Mission College's divestiture of its interests in South Africa. Interrupting the political speech is a line of pledges, with identical clothing and shaved heads, walking in a lockstep. This is the Gammite pledge group, and they enter the scene shouting, "G-Phi G' G-Phi G' G-Phi G!" A fairer-skinned Gammite, Julian, and his girlfriend Jane, who is a Gamma Ray, approach Slice.[7] Julian, centimeters from Slice's face, states emphatically, "We don't approve of all this African mumbo jumbo and we're here to let you know it," to which Slice replies, equally as assertive and angry, "Julian, you need to WAKE UP!"

The opening scene presents the spectator with a historical and cultural time line of college life at Mission that seems to read: Mission College was once an institution where culture and politics thrived, but it has eroded into two camps—the light versus the dark, the politically apathetic versus the politically strong. Mission College is an institution controlled by Lee's Wannabee fraternity and sorority characters, and the film's introductory song and scene suggest that Slice, and characters like him, cannot find a home within the modern African American college community. *School Daze*'s beginning, then, sets the stage for the inane cultural politics of the film: fair-skinned African Americans are all "bad" and want to be white, and dark-skinned African Americans are all "good," authentic black folk. The Wannabee sorority women and their brown-skinned counterparts, the Jigaboos, are central examples of this dichotomous ideology. I thus turn to a key point in the film, the large-scale song and dance performance that won the film the designation musical comedy: Lee's "Straight and Nappy: Good and Bad Hair." It is here that the perceptions of African American sororal groups and women in general are at their most glaringly misogynistic and troubling. It is also here where the film offers its most important cultural lesson.

The Wannabee sorority women, led by Jane, and their aesthetic opposites

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the Jigaboos, led by Rachel, meet in the campus cafeteria hallway and exchange words. The Jigaboos accuse the Wannabees of wearing weaves and colored contact lenses, and the Wannabees reply that the Jigaboos are jealous of them. The film jump cuts to the women running toward what becomes the set for the musical number, Madame Re Re's Hair Salon, to sing the "Straight and Nappy" song:

> WANNABEES: Pickaninny.
> JIGABOOS: Barbie doll—high yellow heifer.
> WANNABEES: Tar Baby!
> JIGABOOS: Wanna Be White!
> WANNABEE CHORUS: Don't you wish you had hair like this then the boys would give you a kiss.
> JIGABOO CHORUS: If a fly should land on your head then I'm sure he'd break all his legs 'cause you got so much grease up there tell me dear, is that a weave that you wear?

The women's clothing, appearance, dance movements, and props present an iconic message. The Wannabee women wear the colors gray and white and taunt the other women with Hattie McDaniel masks; the Jigaboos wear red and white and taunt the Wannabee women with Vivien Leigh masks. Their clothing is strikingly similar to the colors of AKA and DST (intense pastels and bold colors), and the animosity between the women is suspiciously close to the long-standing feud rumored to exist between the two sororities and alluded to by Tisha Campbell's earlier commentary. The Hattie McDaniel masks suggest that Wannabees associate dark-skinned women with mammies,[8] and the Vivien Leigh masks imply that the light-skinned women are mirror images of hyperfeminine, refined white womanhood. According to the film's iconography, Wannabees are the mistresses of Jigaboos, just as in the film *Gone with the Wind* Vivien Leigh plays the mistress role and Hattie McDaniel plays the servant. These two camps thus represent the extremes of cinematic caricature in a film of southern loss and redemption.

The production also drew from another popular motion picture; Lee intended the "Straight and Nappy" piece to be an African American version of *West Side Story,* with two "gangs" arguing over the virtue of their hair texture. Spike Lee and his father, Bill Lee, wrote the words for the song. The lyrics were meant to represent how African American people judge one another by their hair texture. Bill Lee reveals in the production notes that not wearing the right

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hairstyle—which, according to dominant beauty standards, is chemically treated—causes cultural confusion inside and outside of African American communities. For black folks in particular, Bill Lee writes, "When we say 'straight and nappy,' we refer to a criterion which Black people use to defeat or to praise; we use it as a weapon, have used it very effectively over the years, and will continue to do so."[9]

The scene and dialogue akin to the "Straight and Nappy" song, where the Wannabees and Jigaboos exchange hair texture and skin color insults, take place at a Greek step show.[10] While the Gammites are performing step movements and chanting onstage, the Gamma Ray and Jigaboo women are in the audience spoiling this cultural tradition with their hair and skin color squabbling. For example, the Jigaboos snap to the Wannabees: "Your eyes are blue, but you ain't white, your hair is straight 'cause you pressed it last night!" The Gamma Rays, with an equally vicious rhythmic bite, respond: "Who wants a Jigaboo? Why don't you check the local zoo? 'Cause we spent the other day at the local zoo and they had a big, nappy beast and it looked like you . . . and we looked up at the cage it said, 'Jig-a-boo!'"

Spike Lee's take on the politics of skin color and hair texture begs questions that the film is incapable of answering with nuance and complexity: Are lighter-hued African American women the sole perpetuators of the pathological discrimination he visualizes? In what ways do men and the dominant society project and perpetuate rigid, Anglocentric beauty aesthetics onto African American women? What role do heterosexuality and heterosexism play in these constructions? As Kobena Mercer writes, "hair is never a straightforward biological fact, because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally worked upon by human hands."[11] Given Mercer's insight, and in the age of what bell hooks names "postmodern blackness,"[12] can we as cultural critics and artists even talk of authentic and artificial feminine cultural identities? Does hair texture and skin color inform an individual's cultural and political proclivities?

"Straight and Nappy" and the Greek show scene not only stereotype African American women but also obscure that hairstyling for African American men is also entrenched within the relational discourses of style, the aesthetics of cool, and the dominant cultural belief system.[13] Unfortunately, hairstyle politics as it affects men and masculinity is absent in the film, other than a brief moment when the male Jigaboos denigrate a group of "local yokel" African American men for their curly hair processes (known at that historical moment as Jeri-curls). At a neighborhood fast-food restaurant (a chicken

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shack), the two groups have a verbal altercation where the locals accuse the Jigaboos of not being black enough because they are college students. When one of the locals asks Slice if he is black (read black enough), Slice responds with anger: "Don't ever question whether I'm Black. In fact, I was gonna ask your country, 'Bama' ass, why do you put those Jeri-curl, drip-drip chemicals in your black nappy hair? And, on top of that, come out in public with those plastic shower caps on your head just like a bitch."

This scene supports the film's position that men are authentic political subjects and that deviation from this essentialist position is feminine. Black male identity here is stable and fixed, and when it is questionable, it is seen as sign of femininity. The color complex within African American communities is women's domain, and the political struggle over blackness is men's terrain. By limiting the issue of colorism to a feud between women and signifying political advocacy by a hairstyle, Lee cinematically sidesteps the desire for the dominant conceptualization of beauty demanded by hegemonic masculinity. That is, he avoids the influence and role of the debilitating forms of hegemonic black masculinity and heterosexual courtship in the politics of skin color. As sociologist Margo Okazawa-Rey argues, "The pathological effects of color consciousness have affected some black men so deeply that it is not outrageous to imagine a scenario in which a light skinned black woman finds herself chosen by a black man who, she later discovers, is acting out some subconscious desire to possess the [once] unobtainable white woman."[14]

The film's denial of this larger cultural context is crucial, because it shifts and projects colorism onto African American women. *School Daze*'s masculinist narrative thereby denies the way gender relations and dominant constructions of male desire impact African American women. Put another way, the process by which male-centered discourses and dominant cultural attitudes create, fuel, and foster the aesthetic insecurities and beauty standards that the two groups of women represent is concealed in the film. Indeed, what *School Daze* misses with the "Straight and Nappy" song and the Greek show scene is the cultural and historical roots of color prejudice in America.

Lee's take on color and political divisions in African America holds different meanings when placed in an intracultural context. *School Daze* is a postmodern production of the house versus field slave narrative often espoused by black nationalists in the 1960s, which held that skin color influenced the insurgency of African slaves.[15] Of course, colorism among African Americans exists within all color spectrums; skin color often becomes an aesthetic cultural wager in a basically racially intolerant and color-conscious world. In the

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United States, prejudice based on skin color gradation can be traced back to slavery and its aftermath. The color of an enslaved or free African's skin often brought temporary inroads into America's white world, and the advantages associated with it, for the lighter hued, and exclusion for the darker hued. It is no accident that, during slavery, large numbers of free people of African descent had light brown skin color. Social, political, and economic advantages in access to education, land rights, and, for those born enslaved, labor and emancipation, were the by-products of skin color advantage. However, even though skin color was and is an unfair resource and advantage, it did not place people of African descent in an equal position with whites or shield them from stereotyping and racism.[16]

## Black Women on the Politics of Skin Color and Hair

In juxtaposition to Lee's cultural essentialism, novels and cultural texts by African American women provide a counternarrative to *School Daze*. These women write about femininity, colorism, hairstyle, and class through introspective and transformative personal and historical narratives. In her autobiography *Nappy,* Aliona Gibson writes that it is often African American men, not only women, who have a largely negative reaction to her dark brown skin and short Afro hairstyle. She writes that African American men typify her as unfeminine, other men of color treat her as exotic, and white Americans subject her to questions about black history, culture, and politics because she apparently fits their own essentialist notions of authentic blackness. Insofar as sexuality is concerned, although Gibson identifies herself as heterosexual, many read her hairstyle as a sign of lesbianism. In sum, whereas Gibson claims to wear her hair short and "natural" so she does not have to think about it, everyone else, according to her autobiography, thinks quite a bit about her hairstyle and filters their thoughts through essentialist, cultural assumptions about gender, femininity, sexuality, and race.[17]

For her book *Hair Matters,* Ingrid Banks interviewed African American women of different classes, ages, and professions and found that dominant and African American subcultural attitudes do affect their hairstyle choices. Nevertheless, the major reason for these choices was convenience and low maintenance.[18] In their book-length study on colorism and hairstyling, cultural critics Kathy Russell, Midge Wilson, and Ronald Hall found that highlighting, hair straighteners, lightening creams, and hair extensions were

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common among working-class women, middle-class women, and female entertainers of all hues. In contrast, styles such as dreadlocks, twists, African locks, and short Afros were most popular among upper middle class women in the medical, science, and academic professions.[19] Comparatively, cultural critic Noliwe Rooks's historical and cultural study of African American women's hair stylization draws from their letters, archival collections, and advertisements in black magazines to reveal the ways whiteness is sold to and projected onto African American women by white-owned and African American–owned cosmetics companies. African American women, according to Rooks, negotiate and decode these messages of beauty aesthetics not according to their color and class but according to their consciousness and the popular styles in the African American community at a particular historical moment.[20]

All these texts by African American female cultural critics center African American women's voices in a historical and cultural framework, and they push through the essentialist boundaries of *School Daze*. Without denying the debilitating effect of hegemonic standards of beauty and femininity, the aforementioned texts show that women of African descent make hairstyle choices based on a variety of factors. As Kobena Mercer writes, hairstyling within African American communities is not merely an acceptance or rejection of dominant cultural standards. It is, rather, "a cultural practice—the skills of the hairdresser, the choices of the client—the ambiguous metaphor [of hair] alerts us to the fact that nobody's hair is ever just natural, but is always shaped and reshaped by social convention and symbolic intervention."[21] Some of this nuance is present in Spike Lee's production notes, showing the potential as well as the limits of the film. Although African American women's voices are silent in the film, in the book that accompanied it, the actors discussed how they related and objected to playing the roles of Wannabees and Jigaboos. I center the actresses' voices here to pick up where *School Daze* ends. Such an exercise is useful because, as Mercer states about the hairstyle debate in general, the problem with analyses of black hairstyling—written or visual—is that "they rarely actually listen to [or reflect] what people think and feel about it."[22]

In Lee's *Uplift the Race*, Tisha Campbell (Jane) shares the following:

> It was hard for me to play this character. I hated "Jane"—I still hate her. I began to hate the Gamma Rays, the Jigs, and hate myself. It was one of the Gammites (a male actor) who actually came up with the rhyme about the Jigaboos that the Gamma Rays shouted in the Greek Show. If we'd had the time, I think we would have made up something ourselves, something

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> that wasn't so harsh. To me, both rhymes felt uncalled for. . . . I know it was exaggerated for the movie, but it's not so with every light skinned person. There's another story that needs to be told.[23]

Gamma Ray women, according to Campbell, were talking heads for African American male anxiety and confusion about African American women's hairstyling, skin color prejudice, and beauty aesthetics. That the male actors wrote the Gamma Rays' line is telling. This ventriloquism places the issue within a male-dominated discourse about African American women, which disenables African American female subjectivity and agency in the film. Certainly the entire film is from the director's male-centered perspective, but that Lee encouraged the men to write the lines for the women illustrates his presentation of African American sorority women through the eyes of men, not as a true depiction of the everyday lives of the objects of his caricature. Most of the actresses admitted as much and felt that, unlike the male actors, they were not agents or innovators in the film process. Indeed, the African American actresses in *School Daze* were very uncomfortable and upset before and after the "Straight and Nappy" and Greek show scenes. As Joie Lee, who played one of the Jigaboo characters, explained, "The verses we said [at the Greek show] blew the Gamma Rays away; they took it very, very personally . . . the Gamma Rays were looking at us like, 'Are you playing a character or not?' Some of them were so upset, even in tears."[24]

The behind-the-scene problems inform the film's actual presentation in other ways. All the women who played the Jigaboo characters stayed at inexpensive hotels during the filming of *School Daze,* with no wardrobe people or beauticians to style their hair. Wannabee men and women and the Jigaboo male characters stayed at an expensive hotel, were given wardrobes, ate catered meals, and had their hair done by stylists. It was Spike Lee's policy for the groups to remain separate and unequal, so that they could stay in character. The actresses playing Jigaboo women were apparently conditioned to harbor anger and resentment toward the rest of the actors and crew. Lee's separation of the actors facilitated their character development but caused problems among the women both on- and offstage. Another female actor in the role of a Jigaboo revealed that the women "felt like Jigaboos on and off camera. We felt we weren't wanted, felt conscious of our physical appearance: the shade of our skin, the texture of our hair. We weren't Wannabees, and the Wannabee women were fine, you know? We Jigs were getting shafted. . . . It was like real life. Spike was trying to make this one point and he made us become a stereotype."[25]

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I concentrate here on the emotions concerning hair and skin color to point out what the film could have done in terms of cultural work. *School Daze*'s depiction of such problems among women, and Lee's directorial strategy of separating the actors, may appear to be the work of a magnificent auteur. Yet *School Daze* does not explore the politics of skin color and hair texture in African American life in a way that is cinematically transformative. Writer Amiri Baraka reveals this problem when he writes that the film's comedic take on color and hair texture translates into "a bit of music, ahistorical and cartoonish, reduced to the beat of a sorority competition."[26] Couched within culturally myopic binaries, African American women—and particularly African American sororities—are spectacles that push Lee's one-sided cultural narrative.

*School Daze*'s narrative leaves little doubt about which group Spike Lee thinks are cultural *imitators* (i.e., African American sorority women) and which are political *initiators* (i.e., African American men). Jigaboo women, or, as Lee writes in his production notes, "da natural sistahs," lack cultural and political vitality too and become tools to chastise the Gamma Ray characters. For example, when Rachel, the lead Jigaboo character, announces her plan to pledge Delta Sigma Theta sorority, her boyfriend strongly objects and lists the shortcomings of BGLO membership. Rachel's comment strengthens the subtle suggestion that AKA and DST are the organizations the film means to mock. It appears, then, that AKAs are the film's Wannabees, DSTs are the film's Jigaboos, and both are treated as peripheral to the pressing issues of public life and politics. As cultural critic Michelle Wallace writes, Lee uses "Black female humiliation as plot resolution" in most of his films, and *School Daze* is in accord with his apparent quest to construct an essentially good, black male cinematic subject at the expense of myriad African American representations.[27] Nowhere is Wallace's observation more evident than in the emotionally intense sexual climax of the film.

## The Sexual Politics of *School Daze*

A particularly humiliating moment in the film, when Lee uses one of the sorority women to depict what is troubling about African American Greek-letter organizations, occurs in the next-to-last scene. Julian, the lead Gammite brother, coerces his girlfriend Jane, the lead Gamma Ray sister, into having sex with a pledge, Half Pint, as part of his initiation. Half Pint (played by Spike Lee) is a virgin, and Julian assures him that he will not be a real man until he has at least

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one sexual conquest under his belt. Julian then turns his attention to Jane and asks her if she loves him and the frat, to which she answers yes. Julian then enthusiastically tells Half Pint—while coaxing him and Jane into a dimly lit bedroom—to "Wear her out like a natural Gamma man!" After the act between Jane and Half Pint, Jane confronts Julian:

> JANE: I did what you said.
> JULIAN (appearing puzzled): What is that?
> JANE: I did it with Half Pint.
> JULIAN: You did what?
> JANE: You told me to!
> JULIAN: The hell I did. You gave it up to Half Pint? How could you? I thought you loved me. Now you're boning my own frat brother. My own frat brother.

Jane's acquiescence to her own sexual degradation conceals and deflates Julian's heavy-handed and emotional coercion of the sexual (power) act. Jane's affirmative answer when asked about her love for Julian and the fraternity is cinematically positioned to frame the act between Jane and Half Pint within a context of consensual sex, even though it was prodded by Julian's power play. Jane is presented as "getting what she deserves," so to speak, by her bad decision making, even if, in the end, the viewer may feel sympathy for her apparent naïveté. After all, she enters the room and does not accuse the pledge, or Julian, of forcible sex. In order for Half Pint to be not half a man but a natural Gamma man (and, certainly, Julian too), the men use a woman's body as sexual currency to ensure this hegemonic masculine transfer.

When the humiliated Jane confronts Julian to tell him that she has gone through with the act that he coerced, his denial of the sexual request represents a two-pronged point. First, the film leaves no doubt as to where the blame for sexual exploitation lays (i.e., with Jane and, by extension, women in general). Second, Julian's psychological intimidation, Jane's compliance, and Half Pint's inevitable sexual conquest are used to portray Lee's view of BGLOs as morally depraved. It may seem as though the film is critiquing the practice of fraternity rape, which, as explained by anthropologist Peggy Sanday, involves obtaining "consent" to sex by any means so that the young man need not feel responsible for rape and emotional coercion.[28] As Sanday writes, drawing from extensive ethnographic work and interviews with white fraternity members, the old adage and double standard that no means yes or maybe is taken a step

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further; that is, no means no until a woman can be *convinced* to say yes. According to Sanday, "there is a thin line between rape and 'working a yes out.' 'Working a yes out' refers to encouraging or forcing a woman to consent to sex either through talking her into it or plying her with alcohol."[29]

In the case of *School Daze,* Jane never says yes to sex, but she says yes to the question of her love for Julian and his fraternity. There is no apparent need for Jane's consent—her subsequent actions and admission to Julian imply consent. Despite Lee's warning about the hegemonic constructions perpetuated in the male fraternal apparatus, *School Daze* does not challenge the sexual politics embedded within the fraternity's view of manhood as much as it casts blame, and even shame, on women for their perceived submission to this treatment. Lee shows black Greek-letter fraternities as most concerned with sexual conquest and not community service, just like their white counterparts. With this presentation, Lee is affirming a comment he made in *Rolling Stone* shortly after the release of *School Daze:*

> The idea of fraternities has been corrupted. In terms of what they are supposed to be about—brotherhood, helping, community service, I regret, in my experience, I haven't seen it. . . .The only reason why people join fraternities is pussy. The guys join because of women, and that's because a lot of these women give them what they want. All of the sudden because this guy's a Kappa, Q- Dog, or Sigma, his stock has shot up and he is desirable.[30]

## Audience Reaction

Judging by a questionnaire given to audience members after test screenings, the film appears to have had a disparate impact on its audience. The first screening, to a predominantly African American audience in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 18, 1987, received a 34 percent excellent rating, an 83 percent favorable rating, and a 76 percent recommended rating. The scenes the audience liked the most were the ones involving humor, such as the "Straight and Nappy" scene. The scene they liked the least was the sexual scene at the end. "Confusing" was a common adjective used to describe the message in these scenes. In its second test screening, to a racially mixed audience in Paramus, New Jersey, on August 25, 1987, the film received a 14 percent excellent rating, a 48 percent average rating, and a 35 percent definitely recommend score. Humor was the most favorable characteristic of *School Daze* according to the

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respondents, especially among African Americans. White Americans, according to the survey, enjoyed the singing and dancing in the "Straight and Nappy" and "Greek show" scenes. Nonetheless, these audience members found the overall message confusing as well, with whites in particular describing the movie as "being difficult for them to relate to because it was 'too Black.'"[31]

*School Daze*'s third test screening was in Washington, D.C., on September 3, 1987, to an audience composed of Howard University students. Specific statistics for this screening were not given, but Lee claims that the audience was receptive to the film. Before the screening, however, Lee admitted that he was booed and hissed when he said that he had not shot the film at Howard because he wanted to depict a "real Black college." *School Daze*'s last screening took place on October 1, 1987, in San Francisco. The audience was ethnically diverse, and for the first time, Lee had a focus group after the viewing to discuss the issues presented in the film. According to Lee, participants in the focus group were less receptive to the film, although no statistics were reported. In defense of the film at the focus group, Lee claimed that audience members disliked the film for unintelligent reasons. "There were these six ignorant guys, members of Black Greeks, talking shit," said Lee. "The guys' ignorance was glaring. They were so small-minded. They didn't like the way the frats were depicted, they saw nothing else, and were turned off. The frat shit is just a small part of the film. This film is about something bigger, more important. It's about our existence as people in white America. WAKE UP!"[32]

In the questionnaire summary, Lee does not provide statistics by gender. The survey findings do, however, underscore the tripartite structure of spectatorship described by Stuart Hall. Most audience members negotiated the confusing messages while still being entertained; accepted some of the dominant binaries presented; or, as seen with the African American fraternity members, rejected the dichotomy from an oppositional standpoint. This shows that the viewing process is a partial and a subjective experience. Overall, the majority of audience members found the comedy, singing, and dancing entertaining. Nonetheless, *School Daze* does little to present cultural problems in a way that leads consumers to a new way of seeing and progressive ways of enacting social relations. In her discussion of Lee's entire body of films up to 1994, cultural critic Toni Cade Bambara argues against the idea that the polarization created for spectators alone is transformative. Bambara writes that Lee "situates a range of spectators, often polarized spectators, thereby [appearing to meet] the demand for social relevance." Nevertheless, "he does not let go of basically reactionary sensibility (homophobic/misogynistic/patriarchal) that

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audiences have been trained by the industry to . . . accept as norm, as pleasurable, inevitable."[33]

My critique does not deny intracultural prejudice—historically and currently—in African American college institutions and in BGLOs. Lee's film offers fruitful ground to work through prevalent paradoxes of black popular culture and life concerning representation and identity. This filmic presentation, though, is not enough to understand BGLOs or African Americans' existence as a people in white America, despite Lee's claims to the contrary. Certainly, black fraternal organizations are susceptible to the problems of black life: intracultural prejudice, counterproductive distinction, and the misuse of power. Analyses of media and their forms of commercial culture (e.g., visual representations), as cultural critic Herman Gray reminds us, must not simply consider authentic and accurate portrayals of cultural life. Rather, analyses of popular culture should assess what cultural work these forms of media employ and the various ways one can connect representation to material relations.[34] I want to conclude by taking the fertile seeds of Lee's argument, regardless of its representational accuracy or lack thereof, and place them in a discussion of the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority and the cultural politics of skin color, hairstyles, and femininity. I end in this way to intervene in the popular representation of African American sororities as depicted in the film and to better explain the difficult cultural issues that *School Daze* merely confuses.

## African American Sororities and the Cultural Politics of Skin Color and Hair

In 1998, Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority made national headlines when a Raleigh, North Carolina, alumni chapter insisted that a brown-skinned African American teenager pin up her African locks (commonly called dreadlocks) during its cotillion ceremony.[35] The young woman, Michelle Barskile, refused and skipped the cotillion. Barskile's hairstyle, the cotillion organizers felt, would be a distraction. AKA's hair discrimination was upsetting to Barskile, because she had been looking forward to the sorority's acknowledgment of her academic achievements at the cotillion. Barskile's mother had been an AKA debutante, and Michelle wanted to continue the legacy but did not want to compromise her ethics to conform to the local chapter's rules. When the story made national headlines, AKA headquarters responded to the incident by saying that it was "local chapter business" and that the sorority had "no policy on

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hairstyles."[36] In the press, AKA members pointed to writer Toni Morrison, a well-known member of the sorority who has African locks, as an example of the absence of a hairstyle policy. Allegedly, Barskile's locks did not disqualify her, and cotillion organizers merely requested that she wear her hair in what the chapter considered a suitable style.

Barskile's experience illuminates what is useful in *School Daze*'s argument, despite the film's essentialism. This one particular southern AKA chapter enacted discrimination against Barskile, and the sorority dismissed the incident by pointing to a well-known exception (i.e., Toni Morrison). My point is that the problems of gender, race, hair, and color discrimination were unlikely to be solved by either Lee's misogynistic diatribe in 1988 or AKA's denial in 1998. AKA headquarters' refusal to get involved with "chapter business" conceals rather than intervenes in such practices. As Michelle Barskile said, "if a white group had done this to a black woman, the AKAs would be among the first to cry foul."[37] Noliwe Rooks commented in a *Los Angeles Times* article that the discrimination against Michelle Barskile was not particular to AKA or sororities in general and must be particularized and historicized. Rooks, who wears African locks, said that "many of the people who wear locks are younger people 30 and under and tend to be on the East and West Coasts, where styles are more relaxed than in the South."[38] Although AKA chapters' policies may be attributed to the geographic region, the age of the members, and the historical moment, AKA headquarters' response to the situation requires critique, along with the film that parodied the situation a decade earlier.

Michelle Barskile's story illustrates that agency is not always found within this cultural, social, and political space. Yet, the problem with *School Daze* is not the unmasking of situations like Barskile's but its ahistoricism and cultural essentialism and the way Lee projects these lopsided politics and problems onto African American women. African American women and, by extension, their sororities are simply iconic pawns for Lee's stated agenda. *School Daze* begins an important cinematic conversation, but color, class, and sexuality as they pertain to BGLOs cannot be covered by a simplistic analogy to dark and light skin. BGLOs operate within multiple, highly complex cultural and historically formed contexts not represented by the economic and color determinism of *School Daze*'s haves and have-nots.

BGLOs arose out of a diverse set of circumstances: the cultural tradition of African secret societies, African American benevolent organizations, Greek-letter organizations, literary societies, and fraternal groups as a whole. BGLOs encompass all these formative parts, with cultural context and historical pro-

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cesses affecting each component, not to mention the variables of gender, race, sexuality, color, and class. *School Daze*'s monological argument lacks this historical and cultural contextualization. Instead, it focuses on simplistic and parochial views of African American culture, life, and politics and creates a masculinist perception of African American sororities, rather than representing sorority life as a context where African American women exist as subjects with agency. In critiquing Lee's representations in *School Daze* and his dismissal of black womanhood, cultural critic Houston Baker writes that the film "could reflexively be directed at Lee himself: "'Please wake up.'"[39] Although Lee's book *Uplift the Race* and the accompanying production notes present a grander vision of social change and relevance, the execution of this vision in the film falls short.

## Notes

1. *School Daze,* a film written and directed by Spike Lee, Forty Acres and a Mule Filmworks, Inc.,1987 (WGS East, Inc., #39658). The film was released nationwide in the spring of 1988. All the dialogue quoted in this chapter is taken from the film script.

2. Spike Lee with Lisa Jones, *Uplift the Race: The Construction of School Daze* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

3. This question is asked in a historical context by Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

4. Lee with Jones, *Uplift the Race,* 95.

5. For more on this, see Stuart Hall, "New Ethnicities," in *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies: The Stuart Hall Reader,* ed. Kuan Hsing Chen and David Morely (London: Routledge, 1996); "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular," in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture, a Reader,* ed. John Storey (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998); "Encoding/Decoding," in *Media Texts: Authors and Readers,* ed. David Graddol and Oliver Boyd-Barrett (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Limited, 1994).

6. This is my own observation, but other historians and critics summarize the Reagan-Bush years in a way that substantiates and agitates my assertions. See Sidney Blumenthal and Thomas Byrne Edsall, eds., *The Reagan Legacy* (New York: Panetheon, 1988); Ryan J. Barilleaux, *The Post-modern Presidency: The Office after Ronald Reagan* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1988); Richard Curry, *Freedom at Risk* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); William C. Berman, *America's Right Turn: From Nixon to Clinton* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). For the ways the

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Reagan-Bush years affected African Americans in the cinema, television, and the public sphere, see Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Emily Rosenberg and Norman Rosenberg, eds., *In Our Times: America since World War II* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1995).

7. Spike Lee refers to Jane as "Creole" in his production notes.

8. Hattie McDaniel played the role of mammy in several feature films, including *Gone with the Wind.*

9. Lee with Jones, *Uplift the Race,* 148.

10. Greek step shows are a vernacular practice in BGLOs in which fraternities and sororities showcase verbal chants, stylized movements, body slapping, and drumming. See Elizabeth Fine, "Stepping, Saluting, Cracking, and Freaking: The Cultural Politics of African American Sorority Step Shows," in *A Source Book of African American Performance: Plays, Peoples, Movements,* ed. Anna Marie Bean (New York: Routledge, 1999).

11. Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

12. bell hooks, "Postmodern Blackness," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory, a Reader,* ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 421–27.

13. On hairstyle politics as it relates to African American men, see Robin Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press 1994), 161–83; Henry Louis Gates Jr., "In the Kitchen," *New Yorker,* April 18, 1994.

14. Margo Okazawa-Rey, Tracy Robinson, and Janie Victoria Ward, "Black Women and the Politics of Skin Color and Hair," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 14, nos. 1, 2 (Spring/Summer 1986): 13.

15. The house versus field slave narrative espouses that house slaves were light-skinned men and women who enjoyed privilege because of it, and field slaves were dark-skinned individuals who did difficult, laborious work outside. This was a common argument among black nationalists in the 1960s, such as Malcolm X. See *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches of Malcolm X* (New York: Path Finder Press, 1990). Yet, as historian Debra Gray White notes, female house slaves, especially fairer-skinned ones, faced unwanted sexual assault and did laborious work in the home *and* in the fields, thus adding a gender analysis to this masculinist narrative. See Debra Gray White, "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery," in *Aren't I a Woman: Black Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton and Norton, 1999), 27–61.

16. On this topic, see Kathy Russell et al., *The Color Complex: The Politics of Skin Color among African Americans* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

17. Aliona L. Gibson, *Nappy: Growing up Black and Female in America* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, 2000). For other personal narratives, see Juliette Harris, ed., *Tenderheaded: Black Women and Hair* (New York: Pocket Books, 2000).

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18. Ingrid Banks, *Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).

19. Russell et al., *The Color Complex,* 81–93.

20. Noliwe Rooks, *Hair-raising: Beauty, Culture, and African American Women* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

21. Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," 100.

22. Ibid., 104.

23. Lee with Jones, *Uplift the Race,* 87–95.

24. Ibid., 91.

25. Ibid., 87.

26. Amiri Baraka, "Spike at the Movies," in *Black American Cinema,* ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 145–53. Other cultural critics responded to the film in the following way: Michelle Wallace argued that Lee's portrayals were misogynistic; Wahneema Lubiano argued that the film was essentialist in its dichotomous portrayal of class and cultural politics; Houston Baker wrote that the film erased black womanhood entirely. See Michelle Wallace, "Spike Lee's Women," in *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (London: Verso, 1990); Wahneema Lubiano, "But Compared to What? Reading Essentialism in Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and *School Daze,*" *Black Literature Forum* (Spring 1989); Houston Baker, "Spike Lee and the Commerce of Culture," in *Black American Cinema.*

27. Michelle Wallace, "Boyz in the Hood and Jungle Fever," in *Black Popular Culture,* ed. Gina Dent (Boston: South End Press, 1994).

28. On the practice of fraternity members using coercion to obtain "consent" for sex, see Peggy Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 111–34.

29. Ibid., 115.

30. Marilyn Freeman and Tina Witcher, "Stepping into Black Power: Black Fraternities and Sororities Give Their Members Access to a Network of Influence and Power—and Good Times Too. So What's Wrong with That?" *Rolling Stone* (September 1987).

31. The survey findings are from Lee with Jones, *Uplift the Race,* 169–81.

32. Although the survey does ask respondents to disclose their gender, class, education, and ethnic identity, Lee does not provide these demographics in his summary.

33. Toni Cade Bambara, "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye: Daughters of the Dust and the Black Independent Cinema Movement," in *Black American Cinema,* ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993), 137.

34. Herman Gray, "Black Cultural Politics and Commercial Culture,"in *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 3.

35. This incident was reported by local news stations, the Associated Press, and the *Los Angeles Times.*

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36. Sam Fulwood III, "A Tangle over Biases about Hair," *Los Angeles Times,* November 20, 1998.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Baker, "Spike Lee and the Commerce of Culture," 168.

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# 16

# "In the Fell Clutch of Circumstance"

## Pledging and the Black Greek Experience

*Gregory S. Parks and Tamara L. Brown*

Despite their long history of civic involvement, community service, and philanthropy, what most people know about black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) is limited to two areas: stepping and pledging, particularly those mentally and physically violent aspects of the latter known as hazing. Without question, pledging has become a contentious issue for both BGLO members and nonmembers alike. In this chapter, we set out to shed light on this topic by first tracing the history of pledging in general and within BGLOs in particular. Next, we highlight the long-standing concern about, and opposition to, pledging, particularly its more violent aspects. We then turn our attention to the various factors that undergird and propel pledging. Finally, we conclude by providing what we believe are some necessary remedies for the current state of pledging and hazing within BGLOs, some of which depart markedly from what has been proposed by others.

## The History of Pledging

Pledging, like other aspects of BGLO history and tradition, has multiple origins. As noted by other authors in this volume—most notably Gloria Dickinson, Carol Branch, and Sandra Posey—various elements of the pledge process have ties to African antiquity. Given their thorough treatment of this topic, we will not reiterate that history here. However, other historical aspects of the pledge process can be traced, at least in part, to European roots and traditions that are unique to BGLO culture. These aspects are the focus of this section.

Hank Nuwer provides a detailed account of pledging and its early, European origins, noting that the hazing component has existed for centuries.[1] According to Plato, founder of the Academy[2] in 387 B.C., the "savagery" of young



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boys was likened to "acts of ferocious beasts." During that period, hazing was also an issue in other centers of learning, such as Athens, Berytus, and Carthage. In the sixth century, Byzantine emperor Justinian I outlawed the practice of hazing among first-year law students, but by the twelfth century, hazing was rooted firmly in the halls of European academe. During the Middle Ages, hazing was a common occurrence among male university students, who saw themselves as possessed of a culture of honor. Members of such a culture felt compelled not only to perform acts of kindness to repay good done to them but also to reciprocate for the bad done to them.

It was not until the thirteenth century that the term *university* came into use. Prior to that time, learning institutions in many parts of Europe were termed *stadium generale*.[3] The balance of power at these early institutions rested in the hands of student guilds, which were called universities. Once students allowed teachers to determine which candidates would gain admittance to the teaching profession through licensure, the balance of power shifted. Educators formed their own guilds, and learning institutions came under church dominance and professional administration, further eroding student power.

After the rise of universities in western Europe, academic institutions sought to raise institutional standards and prevent charlatans from passing themselves off as scholars. They took on some of the practices of guilds by demanding evidence of scholarship before deeming a prospective teacher qualified. Consequently, these budding scholars endured years of training and were often subjected to hazing by their superiors. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, boys who attended these institutions of learning also had to submit to hazing, but at the hands of older students. As older students routinely hazed newcomers, the practice became ritualized, and as scholars moved from one school to the next, they took these rituals with them.

During the Middle Ages, hazing became a way to teach new students the pecking order and institutional customs.[4] Students were humiliated and made to be submissive. At Avignon (France), first-year students were "hit with a wooden object," while a book or frying pan was used on those at the University of Aix (France). In the fourteenth century, first-year students at the University of Heidelberg (Germany) were forced to don caps with yellow bills. Occasionally, the caps were fitted with horns and animal ears, which were later sawed or pulled off. Older students were also known to extort money from younger students during this period.

In medieval England, younger students were often used for sport by their older male counterparts. Around Christmas at Merton (United Kingdom), it

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was common for new students to entertain older students by telling jokes or reciting maxims. If the newcomer refused or failed to sufficiently entertain, one or more of the older students would scratch his chin hard enough to make him bleed.[5] At prestigious English schools, the practice of "fagging" was instituted, whereby younger students were required to act as servants to older students on the cricket field and in residence halls.[6] The "fag," or servant, was required to fetch tea and food for his "master" and submitted to a kick or a hard rap if he dawdled or failed to obey an order.[7] While fagging was evolving in England, *pennalism* was developing in Germany during the 1400s. *Pennals,* so called because they carried pen cases for use during lectures, were freshmen at German universities. Pennalism grew out of the notion that freshmen were uncivilized and untutored, and under that system, freshmen had to wear odd clothing and were subjected to extortion, coarse jokes, and physical abuse.[8]

European students or their tutors likely brought fagging to the New World, for as early as 1657, new students at Harvard were bedeviled by acts of servitude similar to European fagging.[9] By the eighteenth century, such acts had become an integral part of first-year Harvard students' lives. They had to wear white hats while speaking to seniors, and those who refused were forced to yield. Freshmen were required to run errands for seniors, except during study hours and after 9:00 P.M., and they were required to purchase sports equipment for upperclassmen. Fagging was discontinued at Harvard in 1798 but remained a part of institutional life at other schools, such as Yale, until the late nineteenth century.[10] In addition to fagging, class fights, also known as "battle royals," revealed a much more violent aspect of hazing. During such scraps, first-year students and upperclassmen fought over such things as banners and flags. At some universities, deaths resulted from these activities.[11]

By the mid-1800s, hazing, so much a part of university life already, was integrated into fraternity and sorority culture. Around this time, a probationary period for prospective members was also added. Early on, prospective members were initiated immediately after selection. However, as one member of Phi Gamma Delta wrote in 1849, "There must be something held back—something that will operate as a powerful motive in inducing those initiated to be true to their vows."[12] In addition to fagging, pennalism, battle royals, and probation, other factors informed white college students' notions of how they should go about bringing members into their fraternal groups.[13] Some were aware of the secret societies to which their parents belonged. They liked "what they heard from their fathers about 'riding the goat,' 'walking the burning sands,' and other high-jinx of the town's elite when gathered in the local temple of

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some Ancient, Mystical, and Fraternal Order."[14] Additionally, some of the strenuous activities associated with hazing were borrowed from the military, which might be traced to veterans returning from war and entering university life.[15]

In addition to hazing, other methods were introduced by which prospective members were brought into college fraternities and sororities. One in particular was rushing,[16] which may have taken its name from competitive encounters between freshmen and sophomores at the turn of the twentieth century called rushes. Alternatively, it may have developed from a slang term for courting a girl by heaping numerous and insistent favors upon her. Within fraternal groups, rush became a process by which prospective members were wooed and courted.

What should be clear from this brief history is that white institutions of higher learning have been confronted with the issue of student hazing for centuries. However, it was not until the twentieth century that this practice extended its reach to include students at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) as well. Upperclassmen at Lincoln University subjected freshmen to paddlings almost nightly, from the beginning of the academic year until the holidays. Freshmen were called "dogs" and were made to roll pencils with their noses, clean sophomores' rooms, and write insulting letters to their own girlfriends. Before the major football game at Thanksgiving, freshmen were herded together and had their heads shaved bald.[17] Around 1920 at Howard University, freshman were called "paenies" and were required to don "paenie caps."[18] By 1924, freshman hazing at Howard was expressly "tabooed." However, the university-wide existence of hazing made it easy for fraternal groups to adopt the practice.[19]

From its earliest days, fear and secrecy played an integral role in the selection process of new BGLO members at white institutions and at HBCUs. In 1913, members of Alpha Phi Alpha at the University of Pittsburgh sent prospective members a letter that opened with: "Victim! Beware! Victim! Beware!"[20] A review of early Howard University yearbooks illustrates this point as well, with frightful images prefacing the fraternity and sorority sections. By the 1920s, it was evident that pledging was an arduous endeavor. A 1925 account of "Hell Week" appeared in Howard's student newspaper. It revealed that probates[21] sang the praises of their respective groups while marching around campus in "odd attire."[22] At Lincoln, a student reported witnessing "men beaten until portions of their bodies were raw as fresh beefsteak."[23] A poem that was featured in a 1941 issue of the *Fisk Herald* gives further insight into probate activities:

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The once in a lifetime, The week in Hades, A trip without sleep,
That's probation!
Midnight excursion to here, to there, Everywhere!
That's probation!
Victims on pro battered and beaten, pilloried and paddled,
That's probation![24]

Over the years, BGLO pledging evolved and was refined. In the 1910s and early 1920s, pledge clubs emerged. Their goals varied from campus to campus and over time. In some instances, their members were required to sponsor projects, learn parliamentary procedure and group ideals, demonstrate scholarship, and perform service. Pledges of one group might compete in athletic events against pledges of other groups. In 1919, the Scroller Club was founded at Ohio State for pledges of Kappa Alpha Psi.[25] This was followed by the founding of the Pyramid Club in Philadelphia for Delta Sigma Theta pledges in 1920,[26] the Sphinx Club at Howard for Alpha Phi Alpha pledges in 1921,[27] and the Ivy Club at Wilberforce for pledges of Alpha Kappa Alpha in 1922.[28] At Howard University, the 1920s and 1930s brought the creation of the Lampodas Club for pledges of Omega Psi Phi and the Archonian Club for pledges of Zeta Phi Beta.[29] This period also saw the emergence of the Crescent Club for pledges of Phi Beta Sigma and the Aurora Club for pledges of Sigma Gamma Rho.

From their inception, BGLOs sought the "cream of the crop" to fill their ranks. In particular, they sought students who excelled academically and were involved in extracurricular activities as a way to enhance the prestige of their organizations. Not surprisingly, then, rushing of undergraduate men by fraternities at institutions such as Howard during the 1930s and 1940s created an air of excitement. Men were invited to "smokers," and during these informal meetings, fraternity men set out to capture the interest of as many men as possible. The smoker format typically consisted of a speech by members on the history of the organization and a list of the chapter's accomplishments. Faculty members who were also members of the fraternity spoke about the organization's national strivings and contributions toward uplifting the race. An informal reception typically followed. It is speculated that there was a similar procedure for sororities.

Early on, pledge activities at institutions such as Clark included eating meals together, attending chapel and university functions together, and dressing alike.[30] Walter Kimbrough provides an excellent account of other aspects of the pledge process that were added over the years, based on his review of

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HBCU yearbooks.[31] In the 1920s, pledges were given descriptors, such as "barbarians" (Delta Sigma Theta, Sigma Gamma Rho). By the 1950s and into the 1960s, this practice really took hold, with pledges being described as "apes" (Alpha Phi Alpha), "dogs" (Alpha Phi Alpha, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma), "plugs," and "worms" (Alpha Kappa Alpha). In the 1930s, distinctions were made between pledges and members by the designations "little brother" or "little sister" and "big brother" or "big sister." By the 1940s, pledges began carrying objects that had significance to their respective organizations (e.g., lamps for Lampodas, ducks for Pyramids, ivy plants for Ivies). The concept of "crossing the burning sands" emerged during this period as well. In the 1950s, pledges began dressing alike. Men wore nearly identical suits, ties, and hats. In some instances, they wore tuxedos, capes, top hats, and turbans and even carried walking canes. Women wore matching skirt and blouse combinations. It was during this period that the concept of a "line" emerged as a descriptor of the pledge club. Pledges lined up according to height order, either from shortest to tallest or vice versa. Additionally, this period saw the use of collective line names. For example, the 1964 Sphinx Club at Howard was called the "Magnificent 30." Pledges during the 1950s also began greeting their big brothers and big sisters with pronouncements such as: "Southern playalistic, realistic, check it out and peep the statistics. Coming straight from Charlotte, NC, supreme dean in the place to be. Product of the real HU, a diabolical duce, not simply a two. Iceman, two cold, two cold. Disciple of the black and old gold scroll—representing . . . don't you know. If you didn't know before, yo, now you know!"[32]

By the 1960s, male pledges were having their heads shaved clean or into Mohawks, and both male and female pledges began using lavalieres (known as lavs in some places), wooden objects cut into shapes of significance to a pledge's respective organization. For example, a Delta pledge might have a lavaliere in the shape of a pyramid. It was worn about the neck and, in some cases, was painted or decorated with the pledge's line number. The lavaliere was an object to be protected at all costs. If it was lost or taken by a big brother or big sister, the pledge was technically no longer pledging the fraternity or sorority. By the 1960s, pledges were given individual line numbers and line names.[33]

Quite similar to their white counterparts, BGLOs were exposed to a confluence of factors that affected the development of the pledge process. Adult secret societies, pennalism, fagging, and the like all contributed to how BGLO members constructed what we now understand to be pledging. Added to this were military influences. African American GIs returning from World War II or the Korean War may have brought military practices back to college cam-

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puses with them.[34] Activities such as walking in line and dressing alike may have been part of their contribution to the evolution of pledging.[35] The "grit," consisting of a contorted and stern face with an out-thrust lower lip, head up, and gaze forward or slightly up, also belies a military influence. This mask of intensity, emotionlessness, and coolness under pressure resembles a stance demonstrated by military recruits when being reviewed by a superior officer.[36]

## Growing Opposition

Contrary to what many believe, resistance to the more violent aspects of pledging dates back to the early days of BGLOs. André McKenzie's analysis of black fraternities at HBCUs between the 1920s and 1960s highlights that fraternity officials, university administrators, and students alike argued against the practice of brutal hazing.[37] In a 1938 issue of Omega Psi Phi's *Oracle*, one member writes, "the time for brutal initiations has passed. I said that ten years ago. They thought I was crazy. Now the papers have taken it up."[38] Nine years later, at Alpha Phi Alpha's 1947 General Convention, actions were taken to eliminate initiation brutality.[39] During this era, Lincoln University instituted a "no-hitting" law, and members of the faculty executive committee at Fisk University suspended probation activities due to brutality.[40] University yearbooks and newspapers were also capturing the more brutal aspects of fraternal life. By the time the civil rights movement took hold in the 1960s, many aspects of the pledge process seemed wholly out of line with its principles. In Delta Sigma Theta, concerns about the pledge process brought about a change in its administration by former national president Jeanne L. Noble, who served from 1958 to 1963. However, by the early 1970s, complaints about abuses within Delta Sigma Theta were more numerous.[41] Importantly, Delta Sigma Theta was not alone in this regard; other National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) groups also faced growing reports of hazing incidents.

Between 1970 and 1979, among the many hazing incidents was one at Bradley University, where an Alpha Phi Alpha pledge claimed to have been beaten with fists and paddles, necessitating treatment for acute kidney failure. At the University of Florida, eighteen Omega Psi Phi pledges reported that they were violently hazed, ultimately resulting in a one-year suspension of the chapter. At North Carolina Central University and the University of Pennsylvania, two Omega Psi Phi pledges died. Between 1980 and 1989, the number of reported incidents seemed to be on the rise. In his book on hazing within

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BGLOs, Ricky Jones highlights five Alpha Phi Alpha hazing incidents, eight Kappa Alpha Psi incidents, ten Omega Psi Phi incidents, and two Phi Beta Sigma incidents that also occurred during this period.[42]

During the 1980s, significant changes took place in the BGLO pledge process. One change was in the duration of the process. In some places, pledging had lasted anywhere from one semester to a full academic year. Over time, it was whittled down to between eight and twelve weeks for BGLOs, and in the 1980s, it became a six-week process. In 1984, Delta Sigma Theta adopted the concept of "membership intake" to describe pledging. In 1985, Omega Psi Phi changed its process to reflect a distancing from the brutality traditionally associated with pledging. Alpha Phi Alpha instituted a risk management program in 1986, and Phi Beta Sigma banned pledging in 1987. Despite these efforts, pledging persisted, along with its more brutal aspects. Many members, particularly undergraduates, did not approve of these steps and instituted "underground" pledging as a means to extend the pledge process. Underground pledging had two components: pre-pledging and post-pledging. Pre-pledging provided members the opportunity to spend additional time with pledges prior to nationally sanctioned pledge activities. Post-pledging was a way for prospective members to complete the official, truncated pledge process and then resume pledge status after initiation. This allowed the organizations to avoid any suspicions of hazing by university officials and fraternity or sorority leaders. It allowed the pledges to reap the benefits, as they saw them, of being pledged members of their respective organizations. Thus, efforts to curb hazing may have ultimately served to drive pledging underground and make it less controllable.[43] In October 1989, on the campus of Morehouse College, an Alpha Phi Alpha pledge named Joel Harris died as the result of an underground, pre-pledge session.[44]

Perhaps Harris' death brought pledging opposition to its boiling point, or at least it made those who disapproved of pledging more vocal, for in February 1990, the leaders of all the BGLOs acted collectively to officially ban pledging.[45] The new process, formally called the membership intake process (MIP), was designed to do away with all vestiges of the old pledge process, including walking in line, greeting big brothers and big sisters, and dressing alike. The duration of the process changed as well. Rather than lasting six weeks, the MIP would provide an "intensive" education period of only a few days. Proponents of pledging—largely undergraduate members—were outraged and voiced their concerns at their respective national conventions.[46]

Despite the radical change in the BGLO pledge process, there has actually

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been an increase in hazing incidents and reports of hazing incidents since this historic decision, according to information provided by Walter Kimbrough, Ricky Jones, and Hank Nuwer.[47] According to their collective assessment, since 1990, there have been six reported hazing incidents for Alpha Phi Alpha, nine for Phi Beta Sigma, ten for Omega Psi Phi, nineteen for Kappa Alpha Psi, two for Zeta Phi Beta, three for Delta Sigma Theta, and six for Alpha Kappa Alpha. One of the most recent and widely publicized incidents occurred in September 2002 at California State University in Los Angeles, where hazing resulted in the deaths of Kristin High and Kenitha Saafir, two Alpha Kappa Alpha pledges. At Southern Methodist University in 2003, Alpha Phi Alpha pledge Braylon Curry went into a coma after suffering pulmonary edema from excess water consumption during hazing. This horrific trend underlies the attitudes of many pledging opponents. For example, although Paula Giddings, in her book *In Search of Sisterhood,* acknowledges the positive aspects of pledging (e.g., bonding and understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses), she also points out that "there were excesses, the mean-spiritedness, even the revelation of the sadistic side of human nature, that are inevitable by-products of the pledge period." She goes on to reveal that a hazing incident during her pledge process "cast a shadow over [her] whole sorority experience," which is one reason why she ceased to be active in Delta Sigma Theta for several years.[48]

Pledging opposition rests on multiple foundations, one of which is simply a moral objection to the physical or psychological assault of another human being, which is often a component of the pledge process. Pledging activities have occasionally put pledges in the hospital with ruptured eardrums, ruptured spleens, broken bones, and severe bruises, and some pledges have suffered from various psychological problems as a result of pledging. Worse, some pledges have died. Others oppose pledging because many of its proponents have little cultural competence when it comes to the practice.[49] It is speculated that there is an inverse relationship between cultural competence and the hazing aspects of pledging (i.e., as one's cultural competence decreases, the more likely one is to haze). Additionally, some proponents pose illogical arguments, such as "it happened to me, so it should happen to them," "it is fun," or "it is a means to exert power over others."[50] These arguments do not justify the practice or the risk of physical and psychological harm that can result.

Despite these objections to pledging, the overarching reasons for the actions taken against it seem to be the negative publicity, the strained relationships with host institutions, and the high costs of the litigation that often results when hazing occurs. A number of legal scholars have noted a trend toward

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litigation and the far-reaching liability ramifications for individual BGLO members; university administrators; local chapters; local, regional, and national leadership; national organizations; and universities. Depending on a number of factors, a hazing-related injury or death leaves a plaintiff with a choice of potential defendants.[51]

In the 1989 incident that led to the death of Joel Harris, Alpha Phi Alpha and Morehouse College settled the case for approximately $500,000 each. The Harris family also sued each member of the chapter to the tune of $13 million. The chapter members settled out of court for the maximum value of their respective parents' homeowners' insurance policies.[52] In 1997, Omega Psi Phi lost a civil suit stemming from a 1994 hazing incident at Indiana University, an incident that cost the fraternity $774,000; it also settled out of court for $375,000 in the Joseph Snell (University of Maryland) case.[53] In 1997, Kappa Alpha Psi agreed to settle a wrongful death suit and pay $2.25 million in the Michael Davis (Southeast Missouri State University) case.[54] In 1999, Omega Psi Phi was again sued for $931,428 in the Shawn Blackston (University of Louisville) case. The fraternity lost the case and ultimately sued its own members who were involved in the hazing incident.[55] In the 2002 death of Kristin High and Kenitha Saafir, High's family has filed a $100 million wrongful death suit against Alpha Kappa Alpha's national organization, its Far West regional chapter, and its Sigma chapter.[56] In addition to civil action, criminal litigation is the new front on which hazing is fought. Hazers can be charged with simple assault, battery, kidnapping, false imprisonment, manslaughter, or murder. Criminal liability can even be extended to individuals who assist or encourage hazing or who aid and abet or assist in the crime.[57] For example, five Alpha Kappa Alpha alumni members at the University of North Texas received a probated sentence of ninety days in jail for a 1993 hazing incident.[58] Also, a suit is still pending for a 1999 Delta Sigma Theta hazing incident at Western Illinois University.

Understandably, prospective members who have been injured and the parents of pledges who were injured or killed have lobbied for more stringent hazing laws. Of the fifty states, only Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota, and Wyoming do not have antihazing laws.[59]

## Why We Pledge

Despite intense opposition to pledging among both members and nonmembers, the practice persists and shows no sign of ceasing in the near future. There-

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fore, one must wonder why this phenomenon continues unabated. Certainly, there are trivial and simplistic explanations for pledging, such as members perpetuating the process simply because it happened to them. In such instances, there is often a profound poverty of understanding about the cultural significance of the process. As previously noted, there appears to be an inverse relationship between cultural competence and incidents of hazing. Hence, hazing begets hazing.[60] Intuitively, another likely explanation is that a significant number of BGLO members condone the practice, either actively or passively, and that group officials have yet to propose a suitable alternative.[61] However, research looking at both internal (psychological) and external (sociological) mechanisms provides a clearer understanding of why some BGLO members, both alumni and undergraduates, pledge others and why others allow themselves to be pledged.

In her 2003 dissertation on hazing practices within black fraternities, Teresa Saxton discovered that several themes underlie the persistence of pledging: belonging, bonding, proving manhood, self-esteem and self-confidence, respect, and tradition. The study's participants felt that their respective fraternities were reminiscent of filial ties or early adolescent friendships, which gave them a sense of belonging. Pledging was believed to foster bonding among pledges, in that they were forced to overcome adversity together, learn about one another, and take care of one another. Pledging was also seen as fostering bonds between pledges and big brothers, in that the two groups were required to get to know each other, and pledging provided an opportunity for shared experiences. The study's participants believed that pledging prepared an individual for future obstacles, which was linked to proving one's manhood. The ability to overcome obstacles during pledging also served to enhance members' self-esteem and confidence. Respect was perceived to be created when pledged members traveled and encountered members of the same organization, who might ask, "Where were you made?" or "Where did you pledge?" The implication is that the member has indeed pledged, and being able to indicate where one pledged (i.e., was "made" or "went over") or to respond to a challenge with information learned while pledging engenders respect between members. In addition, although many members of the campus community may not be interested in pledging a fraternal group, they are believed to respect individuals who have the ability and wherewithal to endure a pledge process. With regard to tradition, members saw pledging as a way to keep alive what was perceived to be a continuity of organizational practice.[62]

Other researchers have also found that these factors come into play. With

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regard to feelings of belonging, in his book *Black Haze*, Jones notes that in addition to brotherly relationships within BGLOs, other fictive relationships are played out during the pledge process. He writes that pledging is reflective of father-son relationships in which powerful father figures (members) provide a standard to which sons (pledges) should aspire. Tension arises between the father and son until it reaches a climax. Upon completion of the pledge process, the father embraces the son, and the two ultimately become one in brotherhood.[63] Not surprisingly, some male pledges refer to their dean of pledges as "dad" or "pop," and some deans of pledges refer to their male pledges as "son" or "sun." This is a particularly powerful phenomenon for black males, considering the high percentage who grow up with no connection to their fathers. What is problematic, according to Jones, is that unlike typical rites of passage, which are carried out by community elders, BGLO pledging often involves boys teaching other boys how to be men.

Many of these themes were also evident in John Anthony Williams's findings on perceptions of the no-pledge MIP among BGLO undergraduates:

1. The no-pledge policy was enacted too quickly without allowing undergraduates the opportunity to have input.
2. The national organization's definition(s) of hazing were too broad and did not allow for traditional activities which the undergraduates did not consider hazing (i.e., walking in line, practicing steps, history sessions, dressing alike, speaking in unison, etc.).
3. Not enough time was allowed to properly teach the history and traditions of the organizations to the new initiates.
4. Bonding opportunities were lost under the no-pledge policy.
5. Commitment to the chapter and the national organization's goals are jeopardized when membership is based on financial ability instead of loyalty and commitment to the organization.
6. The policy promotes disunity in the chapter ranks between pledged members and non-pledged members; some non-pledged members feel left out of a common "bonding" experience.
7. The issue of gaining "respect" by pledging is important enough for undergraduates to risk sanctions by engaging in underground or illicit pledging.[64]

Taken together, the findings of Saxton, Jones, and Williams suggest that al-

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though the MIP has been in effect for fifteen years, attitudes about pledging among BGLO undergraduates have not significantly changed over time.

Probably the most common explanation for pledging is that it brings about bonding, that it facilitates brotherhood and sisterhood among members. This is arguably the most essential element of any fraternal group—hence the names fraternity (brotherhood) and sorority (sisterhood). Pamela Reese argues that elements of organizational culture, such as shared attitudes, values, beliefs, and customs, work to propel pledging. Specifically, she notes that the stories members tell about their organizations and their entrance into them highlight their attitudes, values, and beliefs. She notes that these organizational stories serve as narratives that become charged with significance. Not only do these stories serve to highlight personal values, but they also transmit these values and may impel prospective members to have similar experiences in order to have similar stories to share.[65] E. H. Schein contends, "Through stories, parables, and other forms of oral or written history, an organization can communicate its ideology and basic assumptions—especially to newcomers, who need to know what is important not only in abstract terms, but by means of concrete examples that can be emulated."[66] This can be both good and bad. Violence endured during the pledge process is often the central theme of such stories. Simply advising older members to stop telling the stories fails to acknowledge something very important—that what happened in these stories is often what bonds them to one another and possibly to the fraternity.

In 1999, while one of the authors was conducting research on white members of Alpha Phi Alpha, statements by numerous interviewees highlighted the importance of pledging as a means of fostering brotherhood. Many interviewees reported that when they initially expressed an interest in joining the fraternity, members and prospective members alike were resistant. This was, in their opinion, solely because they were white. Through their respective pledge processes, they were able to work through their differences, bond, and forge lifelong relationships. Similarly, during the spring semester of 1997, one of the authors had a conversation with a Muslim member of Alpha Phi Alpha in Washington, D.C. He indicated that although his undergraduate chapter and pledge line were composed largely of Christian men, pledging provided a vehicle through which they could understand and appreciate their differences. Contrastingly, Avril Weathers discovered that the bond created by pledging is not always permanent. Weathers interviewed one member of Delta Sigma Theta who reported that her relationship with her line sisters, though initially very close, became

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strained years later once they found out that she was a lesbian.[67] This suggests that issues of diverse background are best worked out *during* the pledge process, not years later.

There are numerous explanations for why pledging precipitates bonding. In part, it has to do with the group experience of pain or discomfort. Yehudi Cohen writes that the ordeal experienced in the ritual process—what Alan Morinis defines as "the direct sensory experience of pain"[68]—serves to bond individuals to one another.[69] Experiencing pain and isolation "with a group not only serve[s] to cushion the shock but also produce[s] an exceptionally strong bond for initiates."[70] He goes on to suggest that the ordeal creates an environment in which initiates bond even to those who are initiating them. Pain, both psychological and physical, is seemingly such an integral part of the BGLO pledge process that it should be wholly endured and experienced without resistance. For example, a pledge who is paddled should not spontaneously cry out or move his or her body from the assumed paddling position. Moreover, despite the rigors of the process, pledges are expected to assume a grit during their sessions. They also memorize and internalize poems such as Sir William Ernest Henley's "Invictus" ("I have not winced nor cried aloud"), Rudyard Kipling's "If" ("If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds worth of distance run"), and "Test of a Man" ("A man when driven against the wall still stands erect and takes the blows of fate") by an unknown author. Each poem highlights the embracing of pain as part of human development. Morinis lends credence to the belief that endurance of pain is integral to rites of passage by arguing that it is not uncommon for initiates to be forbidden to express emotion or physically react while undergoing the ordeal.[71]

The secrecy that surrounds pledging also fosters bonding. According to Weathers, secrecy is important because it is a mechanism that separates those within the organization from those outside of it.[72] As pledges move along the continuum of secrecy and secret knowledge, they also move along a continuum of internal, organizational inclusion. Therefore, as pledges gain more secret knowledge, they move further from being nonmembers and closer to being full-fledged brothers or sisters. Thus, secrecy increases internal cohesion and defines group boundaries. BGLO pledges are often restricted in their interactions with individuals who are not members of the group they aspire to join. Simultaneously, because they are not yet members of the chosen group, they find themselves in what Arnold van Gennep describes as the transition period of the ritual process.[73] As such, secrecy provides for strong in-group–out-group dynamics. Although not specifically dealing with the concept of secrecy, a 1997

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article in *Black Issues in Higher Education* highlights the in-group–out-group phenomenon well: "The boys go to the bathroom. Ear pressed to the door, I hear their violent whispers. They won't quit now, and they won't let Three [the third pledge] fail—their hardships have made them brothers, a clan united against us. We are the obstacles they must overcome."[74] Thus, pledging creates a situation in which the pledges become the in-group and the big brothers or sisters become an out-group. The big brothers or sisters are an obstacle that the pledges must overcome to earn the right to be called brother or sister. Given such dynamics, it is not surprising that pledging serves to reconstruct an individual's social identity, such that he or she becomes strongly bonded with the in-group.[75]

Pledging also provides a source of institutional continuity. For one thing, it fosters bonding, in that it "brings in new members whom the old members see as being culturally like them."[76] Thus, the older members feel as though they can connect with and relate to the new members. Also, pledging provides continuity across regions. For example, a pledged member of Phi Beta Sigma from New York can presumably meet a member from California and have an almost instantaneous connection because of the shared pledge experience. Part of this, particularly among younger BGLO members, is largely because of their presumably common knowledge of organizational secrets. However, this concept is questionable owing to the lack of uniformity in pledge processes. Whereas a member of Sigma Gamma Rho from one chapter may know the broad sorority history, a member from another chapter may know largely her own chapter's history. Also, in terms of history, there is no guarantee that all members have been taught the same information.

The concept of proving manhood has also been given some attention. Here again, Jones has done some excellent scholarship in outlining societal notions of what constitutes manhood for black men and how their social and political marginalization aids in promoting their search for alternative arenas where they can be regarded as men.[77] One way of accomplishing this, especially within intraracial contexts, is to be physically dominant or to demonstrate the ability to withstand physical abuse.[78] Hence we find black men, regardless of their economic background, who participate in BGLO pledge processes. Such marginalization and pressure to live up to a masculine ideal likely account for the higher rate of physical hazing incidents in black fraternities than in black sororities or white fraternities and sororities. Because there is such a strong need for this rite of passage—providing a transition from adolescence to adulthood and from prospective membership to full-fledged membership—banning pledging outright is likely counterproductive. The reliance on pledging

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for the aforementioned benefits that accrue from it impels members and prospective members alike to create pledging in its absence.[79]

Added to this is the concept of self-respect or self-esteem. Pledge processes can create monumental hurdles for both the individual and the pledge line to overcome within a short time. These hurdles can come in the form of intrapersonal as well as interpersonal dynamics. As such, overcoming these hurdles seemingly provides pledged members with an increased sense of self-worth. Pledges feel that they have done what many either cannot do or do not want to do. In many instances, pledges have accomplished something that they may have initially thought was impossible.

As a theme, respect has been explored by others, and it seems to have a trickle-down effect. Despite BGLO officials' protestations against pledging, it has been argued that these same officials do not respect members who do not pledge.[80] Even if this is not true, the mere perception that it is true has consequences—namely, prospective members desiring to pledge. This perception, combined with the advent of the MIP, has created a two-tier system within BGLOs. The top tier consists of individuals who have pledged, and the bottom tier consists of those who have taken the MIP route to membership. This distinction is most evident among younger members. Those who pledge often know far more about their respective organizations, as well as poems, songs, and other information associated with the pledge process. Often, this information is as detailed as knowing the contents of a specific page in the organization's history book, locations of various chapters of the organization, and the Greek alphabet. Those who do not pledge are either not privy to this information or do not seek to learn it after becoming a member. Additionally, there is a qualitative distinction in the information that pledges learn. For instance, a pledged BGLO member might be able to recite a poem, song, or phrase learned on line with a degree of intensity and proficiency that is typically acquired only while pledging. It goes beyond mere memorization; there is an internalization of the meaning of the piece—understanding extends to an experiential level. Due to these factors, nonpledged members often stick out like sore thumbs among pledged members and may not be respected, because of these differences. Because of the emphasis on pledging among some BGLO members, in many circles, members who pledge but are not initiated (ghost members) are often more respected than members who are initiated but do not pledge.

Added to these themes are two others: commitment, and the process of breaking down and building up. Pledging proponents contend that pledging

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strengthens the ties between the individual and the organization. Pledging opponents use anecdotal evidence of BGLO members who are not financially active to undermine this argument. For example, they posit that BGLO members who have not paid dues to their respective national organizations or local chapters, typically alumni, are not committed to the organizations. Opponents also try to undermine the commitment argument by citing BGLO members who do not participate in the various civic, community service, and philanthropic activities. They argue that a BGLO member who may or may not be financially active but who is not involved in implementing the organization's national programs is not committed. However, this may be using an overly narrow definition of commitment, impairing the ability to see where the commitment actually lies. For pledged members, commitment to the organization can best be understood as a series of concentric circles, with the pledge line at the center and the national organization as the outermost circle. To them, fraternity or sorority does not start with a corporate office in a distant city or with an abstract notion of fraternity or sorority. To them, the fraternal idea is best understood as tangible relationships, starting with line brothers or sisters. For them, that is where their primary commitment lies. This does not mean that pledging does not commit members to the broader organization. In fact, Stephen Sweet's work on symbolic interaction suggests otherwise. Symbolic interaction theory undermines the concept of enduring personality traits and asserts that the self, the core identity of the person, is malleable and can be shaped and reshaped. He goes on to write that, through symbolic interactions, the self is socially constructed, and fraternal groups reconstruct the material self of pledges through the use of pledge pins, manuals, books, and other pledge paraphernalia. In turn, such identity reconstruction enhances the degree to which the fraternal group becomes part of the pledge's identity.[81]

Additional research suggests that individuals who undergo severe initiation perceive the group to which they are initiated as more attractive than do those who undergo mild or no initiation. It is speculated that severe initiation fosters greater attraction because of cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance theory, in this instance, posits that no matter how appealing a group is to an individual, it usually has some drawbacks. If the individual undergoes an unpleasant initiation in order to join the group, that unpleasant experience is in striking contrast to the reality of the drawbacks of the group. This "striking contrast" is the dissonance, which can be reduced in two ways. The individual can convince himself or herself that the initiation was not as bad as it really was, or he or she can exaggerate the positive aspects of the group. The more

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severe the initiation is, the more difficult it becomes for the individual to convince himself or herself that it was not particularly bad. Therefore, the initiate tends to reduce dissonance by overestimating the virtues of the group.[82] Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that pledging serves, in some way, to commit members to the organization at multiple levels.

As previously noted, Sweet's work on hazing and symbolic interaction theory suggests that pledging serves as a mechanism for identity reconstruction. Numerous psychological processes are put in place throughout the pledge process, which can alter the way individuals look at themselves, the group (their line, chapter members, national fraternal body), and others. Much of this transformation occurs through what many BGLO members would describe as breaking down and building up. Through this process, various aspects of a pledge can be deconstructed and reconstructed to serve the group's purpose. It can only be hoped that the purpose is lofty and that it is carried to fruition. For instance, a person who is socially anxious, selfish, and a poor manager of time might be transformed to some degree during pledging. For example, a sorority pledge may be required to perform skits for big sisters; take up slack for her line sisters; and effectively juggle classes, a part-time job, and pledging. Through the pledge process, she may thus become more socially at ease, more giving, and a better time manager. This is not to say that pledging can change personality. Victor Turner argues that the process merely serves to divest pledges of certain social qualities and prepare them for investiture with new ones. He goes on to note, however, that pain is not necessary to produce this end.[83]

Given all these factors, it is understandable why some BGLO members endorse pledging. It is also understandable why many aspiring members seek to be pledged. However, some find it peculiar that once pledges are immersed in the process and experience its brutality, they do not extricate themselves from it (i.e., drop line). Just as desires for belonging, bonding, proving oneself, enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence, earning respect, and continuing tradition all play a part in individuals' eagerness to experience a BGLO pledge process, they also play a role in their decisions to see that process through to the end. Even more, once pledges' social and material selves are reconstructed so that they are emotionally and psychologically wedded to the organization and other pledges, dropping out becomes more difficult. In essence, pledges may feel as though they are losing a significant part of themselves by quitting.[84] To an outsider, the notion that such processes can take place in a matter of days or weeks seems inconceivable. The fact that they can and do speaks to the tremendous impact that pledging can have on a person. Barry Staw's re-

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view of the scientific research on compliance reveals that, in addition to not wanting to risk losing aspects of the newly constructed self, an individual will justify previous behavior by perceptually biasing behavioral outcomes. In short, since the individual cannot change his or her condition, the person alters his or her attitude about it to reduce negative feelings stemming from his or her own behavior. Three conditions are necessary for this to occur: the behavior in which the individual engages is not easily changed or is irrevocable, the individual takes some ownership in the behavior, and the individual has anticipated the possibility of negative consequences.[85] In reference to the BGLO pledge process, becoming a pledge is not easily alterable without consequences. The pledge often feels partially responsible for his or her predicament, since it is usually a choice to participate, and since there is at least some degree of awareness that pledging is an arduous endeavor when that choice is made.

## Possible Remedies

Clearly, personal attitudes and beliefs as well as societal messages undergird and propel BGLO pledging. Moreover, there seems to be some currency to these attitudes, beliefs, and messages beyond BGLO members simply acting on them. We already see the truth in the arguments of pledging opponents. That is, it goes without saying that injury and death of aspiring members or litigating these organizations out of existence is something to be avoided. But how do we go about addressing the issues of pledging and hazing if there is some measure of validity to the arguments of pledging proponents? For example, if a goal of BGLOs is to bring about brotherly and sisterly bonds, how do we reconcile the fact that pledging may foster such bonds with the fact that brutalizing pledges is fundamentally counter to brotherhood and sisterhood? It becomes imperative to be able to explore, recognize, and disentangle these issues so that we do not throw the baby (pledging) out with the bath water (hazing). Just as it would be unwise to ignore the threats that hazing poses to the viability of BGLOs, it would also be unwise to ignore the ways in which pledging has made and continues to make BGLOs viable as fraternal entities.

The approach advocated so far has been the MIP, which bans all pledging activities, even those that are not physically or psychologically harmful. The idea behind this strategy is that pledging and hazing, though different, are too inextricably linked to separate them. Thus, the only thing that can be done is to eliminate the entire process, both the good and the bad, and levy stiff pen-

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alties—financial and legal penalties, and the possibility of permanent loss of BGLO membership—to ensure compliance. However, what is clear, especially from the statistics provided by Kimbrough, Jones, and Nuwer, is that this has not worked. The MIP has not put an end to hazing; rather, it has forced pledging underground. It has also distanced proponents and opponents of pledging and cut off dialogue between them. This is most evident in the relationships between undergraduate and alumni members.[86]

Another proposed method of remedying the problem of hazing is to eliminate undergraduate BGLO chapters. However, this is a self-destructive proposition, since a large number of BGLO members are undergraduates, and these organizations were initially founded by and for undergraduate students. Added to this is the naive assumption that undergraduates are the only ones involved in pledging. The reality is that a considerable number of alumni members not only endorse pledging but also participate in the pledging of prospective members. There are also prospective alumni members who actively seek to be pledged even after they have been initiated (i.e., post-pledged). Clearly, the MIP coupled with stiff penalties for individuals involved in hazing activities is not working either. It has merely forced pledging underground, thus serving, at some level, to distance proponents and opponents of pledging.

It appears that the best way for these groups of well-educated African Americans to resolve this dilemma is a multistep process, with the first step being open and honest dialogue among members. In a 1994 article, Michael Gordon, executive director of the NPHC at the time and a member of Kappa Alpha Psi, was cited as being dissatisfied with the level of dialogue among BGLO members about hazing. He went so far as to describe the problem as "a huge wall of silence."[87] A decade has passed since he voiced those concerns, and the wall remains. One might argue that there is a climate of fear within BGLOs that prevents proponents of pledging from gaining a platform from which to argue for a process that is more substantial than that offered by the MIP. Few members are willing to risk the possibility that they or their chapters will be investigated, suspended, and possibly expelled for aggressively lobbying for substantial changes in the MIP. If open and honest dialogue is to take place, we must remove this climate of fear, which serves to silence thoughtful discussion (and behavior) rather than promote it.

We must also guard against black-white thinking, or the tendency to view issues in terms of extremes. This type of thinking is illustrated by an MIP versus all-out-brutality dichotomy—that is, framing the issue as a choice between the MIP and hazing in its most violent form. The assumption seems to be that

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if one speaks against the MIP as it currently exists, one must be advocating brutality. Although painting the issue with such broad strokes clearly conveys the seriousness of the topic and the strong emotions surrounding it, it does not foster the development of solutions. Advocating for pledging does not necessarily mean that one advocates for brutality. More likely, such an advocate is in favor of a rite of passage that fosters a sense of belonging, bonding with members, self-respect, commitment, and so forth. Those who engage in black-white thinking miss this important point. There is a large gray area between the MIP (which many members describe as simply signing on the dotted line) and beating somebody until he or she is dead. It will certainly be a challenge to focus on that gray area, but that is exactly what we need to do if we are to make progress. Refraining from black-white thinking will not only help us focus on that gray area but also foster productive conversations about it.

Another barrier to effective dialogue is that many proponents of pledging either have weak arguments for continuing the practice or are underinformed about its cultural significance and the sociological and psychological mechanisms that make it valuable. Pledging opponents do not need such strong arguments; they have deaths, injuries, public-relations dilemmas, and lawsuits to argue their case. Yet, as explained in other chapters in this volume, the roots of pledging as a rite of passage run very deep and can be traced to African tribal practices and even the ancient Greeks. And, as explained in this chapter, the psychological benefits derived from rites of passage like pledging have been well documented. The problem is that many proponents of pledging are ignorant of this information, and their ignorance means that they cannot generate alternatives to the MIP that capitalize on the rich history and psychological significance of pledging as a rite of passage but eliminate the negative (hazing) aspects. Thus, they cannot meaningfully participate in the sort of dialogue we are advocating.

In addition to open and honest dialogue among members, BGLOs could benefit from an intense and unbiased self-study. Many undergraduate members feel disconnected from national organizations, a feeling that they no doubt carry with them when they graduate and must decide whether to remain financially committed and join alumni chapters. It is likely that national organizations feel disconnected from their chapters and frustrated by their inability to connect with and control their members who pledge and haze. Moreover, the lack of communication within organizations, especially about hazing, may have damaged preexisting fraternal bonds. Thus, it is possible that we now

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have organizations that are out of touch with themselves, especially regarding the issue of pledging and hazing. Among other things, a survey of undergraduate and alumni members, as well as active and inactive members, could reveal what members' pledge processes or MIPs were like and how they influenced feelings of belonging, bonding to brothers or sisters, self-esteem, and commitment to the organization in both abstract and real terms. Information from such a study would be helpful in determining how to structure a new pledge process that is legal and moral and enhances the aforementioned qualities. Hard data and not mere speculation could provide BGLOs with many answers as they seek a solution to the issue of hazing.

Whatever that new process will be, one thing is certain: simply signing on the dotted line or instituting an intense courselike process will not yield the maximum short-term and long-term effects. There will likely need to be an experiential component, not to be read as hazing. The stories that pledged members share suggest this. Without fail, these members' stories do not focus on any substantive information they learned while pledging; rather, they focus almost exclusively on the pledge experience itself. Weathers argues that "the black sorority is organized to produce public service and to reproduce a means for the production of that service."[88] This may be true of the black fraternity as well. If so, the goal of pledging is not just to foster sisterhood or brotherhood but to produce public servants committed to uplifting the race and those who are oppressed, exploited, and disenfranchised. With this in mind, steps should be taken to create a pledge process that commits individuals to the organization and to one another. Additionally, a pledge process should fully orient prospective members to their future roles as public servants and leaders. A process with both didactic and experiential components would better meet this challenge than one that is almost exclusively didactic (e.g., the MIP).

In thinking about what a revised pledge process would consist of, Weathers's[89] elaboration on the work of Pascale[90] and his seven steps of organizational socialization is helpful and can be summarized as follows:

1. Careful selection (of potential members).
2. Humility-inducing experiences (teaching how to make a way out of no way, and fostering bonding).
3. Organizational training (organizational structure, history, mission, and values; teaching how to do public service work).
4. Assessment of operations and rewards (abstract in relation to fraternal organizations, but the gist is that the results speak for themselves and

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the reward is membership). (Although not mentioned by Weathers, one could also assess how well step 3 is being handled.)

5. Adherence to transcendent values (formally, communicated via published material, ritual, and ceremony; informally, through the interpretation of fraternal ideals).

6. Reinforcing folklore (providing legends and interpretations of monumental events in organizational history that validate its culture and aims).

7. Consistent role models and traits (modeling for prospective members who they should strive to become).

In addition, BGLOs can ask what they want their members to be like and use that to establish criteria for selection, as well as methods for shaping individuals to meet that ideal. From our perspective, a pledge should learn the following things:

- Crash course in black history.
- History of collegiate fraternities and sororities—including white, Latino, Native American, Asian American, and each NPHC group.
- Broad understanding of BGLOs in general, including their history, culture, and contemporary issues.
- History of the specific organization, which goes beyond rote memorization.
- Biographical information on founders, general presidents, and prominent leaders within the organization.
- Significance of the organization's insignia and emblems.
- History of the specific chapter.
- Organizational structure of the fraternity or sorority.
- Risk management.
- Chapter officer responsibilities.
- Tips for improving and maintaining individual and chapter scholarship.
- Robert's Rules of Order.
- Social etiquette.
- Songs and poems relevant to the organization.
- Greek alphabet.

Such didactics would serve pledges well in orienting them to BGLO life and are probably fairly easy to implement. In contrast, devising an experiential component would surely be challenging and must consider the views of both pledging proponents and opponents, antihazing laws, and what is acceptable to university officials. The experiential component should also in-

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volve cross-chapter activities, so that bonding is fostered not simply within a line or a chapter but across a larger fraternal unit. In sum, the task of creating a new pledge process is sure to be a difficult one, given how polarized the parties are on this issue. However, it is with considerable optimism that we observe these two sides as they seek to address the key issue for BGLOs, reaffirm their legacy, and craft a vision for the twenty-first century.

## Notes

The quotation in the chapter title is from Sir William Ernest Henley's poem "Invictus," a poem oft-memorized by BGLO pledges. The line connotes being placed in a difficult situation. Here it is used to emphasize a difficult situation that BGLOs must resolve in order to be viable in the twenty-first century.

1. Hank Nuwer, *Wrongs of Passage: Fraternities, Sororities, Hazing, and Binge Drinking* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).
2. The Academy was an informal school of philosophy.
3. Nuwer, *Wrongs of Passage.*
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
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9. Nuwer, *Wrongs of Passage.*
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16. Ibid.
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20. Charles Harris Wesley, *The History of Alpha Phi Alpha: A Development in College Life* (Baltimore: Foundation Publishers, 2000), 87.

21. Walter M. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101: The Culture, Customs, and Challenges of Black Fraternities and Sororities* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003). Kimbrough defines *probate* as synonymous with *pledge*. The term refers to their status of being on probation and prohibited from interacting with anyone outside of other pledges, big brothers or sisters, and faculty.

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23. Ibid., 19.

24. Quoted in ibid., 21.

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27. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha.* The 1924 issue of the *Forcean* gives the date as 1916 but does not note where the Sphinx Club was founded.

28. *Forcean,* 1924.

29. The earliest account of the Lampodas Club was found in the *Oracle,* Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, 1925. The earliest account of the Archonian Club was found in the *Bison,* Howard University, 1930.

30. McKenzie, "Fraters."

31. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101.*

32. An Alpha Phi Alpha greeting for a dean of pledges during an underground, post-pledge process in the 1990s.

33. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101.*

34. Elizabeth C. Fine, *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

35. Ricky L. Jones, *Black Haze: Violence, Sacrifice, and Manhood in Black Greek-Letter Fraternities* (Albany: State University of New York, 2004).

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37. McKenzie, "Fraters."

38. M. Beaunorus Tolson, "Fraternities vs. Oblivion," *Oracle* (March 1938): 24.

39. Wesley, *History of Alpha Phi Alpha.*

40. McKenzie, "Fraters."

41. Paula Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge of the Black Sorority Movement* (New York: William Morrow, 1988).

42. Jones, *Black Haze.*

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45. Michelle N-K Collison, "8 Major Black Fraternities and Sororities Agree to End Practice of Pledging," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 28, 1990, A31.

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47. Kimbrough, *Black Greek 101;* Jones, *Black Haze;* Nuwer, *Wrongs of Passage*.

48. Giddings, *In Search of Sisterhood*, 8–9.

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54. Ibid.

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74. "Pledging a Brother," 26.

75. Stephen Sweet, "Understanding Fraternity Hazing: Insights from Symbolic Interactionist Theory," *Journal of College Student Development* 40, no. 4 (1999): 355–63.

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# FUTURE DIRECTIONS

*Tamara L. Brown, Clarenda M. Phillips, and Gregory S. Parks*

Without question, black Greek-letter organizations (BGLOs) have made substantial contributions to African American history and advancement. Founded upon the principle of racial uplift, BGLOs, for nearly a century, have lent their collective muscle to the fight for economic, educational, and social progress for African Americans in the face of unimaginable racism, discrimination, and oppression. Yet for too long their collective stories have been untold, and their substantial role in the leadership development and high scholasticism of some of this country's greatest inventors, scientists, and innovators has been unknown. It is our hope that this book, though far from an exhaustive account of their accomplishments, has pulled back the curtain on some of the monumental achievements of BGLOs, revealing how they have worked behind the scenes for years to fight for justice, equal access, and the liberation of Africans in the Americas and in Africa. We hope, too, that we have provided a heretofore absent understanding of the historical and social contexts that gave rise to their existence, gave shape to their organizational structures and missions, and gave power to their individual and collective efforts to improve life and liberty for African Americans in this country.

Yet, for all the good they have accomplished, BGLOs have not escaped the structural racism in this country unscathed. Like other African American individuals and institutions, they have struggled with the problems of elitism, colorism, and violence; with how to develop an identity that affirms their African heritage despite messages and images of a savage and uncivilized African continent; and with many other problems endemic to having been formed in a racist U.S. society. At the risk of airing dirty laundry, or of putting our business out on "front street," we have tried to provide an incisive and accurate portrayal of what is currently known about BGLOs, both the good and the not so good. Also, we have provided information on issues that continue to plague BGLOs, particularly the controversy over hazing versus pledging. Such a balanced and scholarly treatment has previously been lacking in books about BGLOs. We hope that future authors will share our enthusiasm in this regard.

We hope, too, that we have succeeded in providing a bit of an insider's view of BGLO culture. Although there is considerable curiosity about this



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topic—especially what makes BGLOs different from their white counterparts—little is known about the inner workings of BGLOs because there has been so little published research in this area. Outsiders see BGLO brands, hear their calls, watch their step shows, and, until 1990, observed the public aspects of their pledge processes, but the reasons behind these practices and what they symbolize for members are largely a mystery to non-BGLO members, as are the mechanisms by which they transmit leadership skills to their members. We have presented what little is known about these topics, but clearly, much more research is needed.

We have been unapologetically scholarly in our treatment of the issues covered in this book. Our desire was to treat BGLOs with the level of seriousness they deserve; thus, we have provided a comprehensive review of the existing literature, drawing from both lay and scholarly works. The contributors to this volume are scholars from across the country, representing many domains (fine arts, higher education administration, history, psychology, sociology). Our coverage has been broad, and the contents of this book represent the "state of the art" as it pertains to BGLOs. We hope that this book will serve as a catalyst for other scholarly and serious treatments of BGLOs, for there is much work to be done. Many relevant topics were not explored in this book but are, nonetheless, important and worthy of research.

For example, several novels by E. Lynn Harris, beginning with his debut novel *Invisible Life* (self-published in 1991 and later picked up by Anchor Books in 1994), have prominently featured BGLOs, fraternities in particular. Since then, a number of other literary works mostly about black sororities, have followed suit. For example, in 2001, Tajuana Butler published *Sorority Sisters,* and Kayla Perrin published *Sisters of Theta Phi Kappa;* in 2002, Breggie James published *Sister Secrets;* and in 2004, Dorrie Williams Wheeler published *Be My Sorority Sister—Under Pressure.* Although they are fiction, they are based on real experiences. As such, they provide varying perspectives on BGLO culture, why people join, and the obligations that come with Greek life; they also, like Spike Lee's *School Daze,* provide commentary on African American culture and community. Literary critiques of these works and other writings that explore BGLO life would be valuable.

A related point is homosexuality among BGLO members, an issue that E. Lynn Harris raises in his books. Harris speaks specifically about black fraternities, and chapter 16 of this book notes one anecdotal example of homosexuality in black sororities. A trenchant analysis of this phenomenon is needed, one that not only discusses its magnitude but also describes the experiences of

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homosexual black Greeks in their own words. Particularly enlightening would be a comparison of stories from homosexual BGLO members who joined before and after the institution of the membership intake process (MIP) and who disclosed their sexual orientation either before or during the pledge process or the MIP. If pledging and the MIP indeed foster sisterhood and brotherhood, such a study would provide an invaluable opportunity to peer through a window to see how that happens. The stories of BGLO members who never revealed their sexual orientation to their chapters or pledge lines and of those who waited to reveal it are also important to hear. The example described in chapter 16 suggests that previously existing bonds are broken when this information is shared, but that may not always be the case. The views and perspectives of nonhomosexual BGLO members on the inclusion of, and their bonding experiences with, homosexual brothers and sisters would also be helpful.

Some BGLOs explicitly state that they were founded on Christian principles. Indeed, the connection between BGLOs and the black church is unmistakable. Although many books have been written on the black church from a variety of perspectives, including historical, sociological, and psychological, no study has been done on the relation between BGLOs and the black church. Yet we know that many BGLO members and founders were active in the church, many black preachers were and are BGLO members, and BGLOs and black churches formed partnerships on many occasions in the fight for racial uplift. Needed, therefore, are historical and sociological analyses of the relationship between BGLOs and the black church that make explicit the Christian principles on which BGLOs were founded and that critically examine whether and how they have remained true to those principles.

Many books have been written and many movies and documentaries have been made on the civil rights movement and the women's suffrage movement. Some have even provided in-depth, behind-the-scenes information about various aspects of these movements, the social and political factors that fanned the flames of unrest and change, and the roles that key people have played. Yet, absent from all these accounts is an explicit tracing of the role of BGLOs as change agents in these movements. This is surprising, given the widespread acknowledgment in this book and elsewhere of the strategic and intentional roles BGLOs played in advancing these causes. Needed, therefore, is research that explores in depth the myriad roles that BGLOs—not just individual BGLO members—played in the civil rights and women's suffrage movements. Along these same lines, a more comprehensive treatment of BGLO involvement in community service and philanthropy is also needed.

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A perusal of the membership rosters of BGLOs reveals that, increasingly, many BGLO members are white. Also increasing is the number of Asian Americans and Latino and Latina Americans who are joining BGLOs. An analysis is needed that traces this trend over time and delineates the social and cultural changes within BGLOs that have given rise to this phenomenon. Among the many questions to be asked are: What prompted nonblacks to want to join BGLOs? What are the experiences of those who were permitted to join and those who were not? How have black BGLO members embraced these new members? Are BGLOs of one mind on this issue—that is, do they all agree that allowing whites and others to join is a good thing? What impact has this had on BGLOs, especially their commitment to social activism and racial uplift?

A critical examination is also needed of whether—and if so, in what ways—BGLOs have maintained their commitment to racial uplift. Without question, BGLOs were founded on the platform of racial uplift, and there are countless examples (some mentioned in this book) of how they have acted in accord with that mission. The question is whether BGLOs have lost their momentum and focus in this regard over time, particularly in light of the new membership intake process, racial integration, and the changing educational, economic, social, and political participation of African Americans in U.S. society. Just six decades ago, most blacks could not work, live, shop, eat, seek entertainment, or travel where they wanted. A majority of blacks lived in poverty, and few black children had the opportunity to receive a quality basic education. Thus, the social agenda for BGLOs was clear and undeniable. But today, the situation is very different. Although the gulf between whites and blacks in this country is far from being closed, the fact remains that many blacks have graduated from universities that previously excluded them and hold jobs in desegregated workplaces. Most blacks vote, and many have been elected to political office. Indeed, many blacks have achieved middle-class status and are quite comfortable. How have BGLOs redesigned their social activist agendas in light of these monumental changes in the U.S. landscape for blacks? Are BGLOs as "in touch" with the black community as they were in the past? Are they continuing to engage in racial uplift to the same degree that they did historically? If so, how? If not, why not? Considerable research has described today's youth, fed from the silver spoons of middle class rather than the plastic spoons of poverty, as apathetic and self-centered. Has this infiltrated the ranks of BGLOs? And if so, how has this influenced the effectiveness of BGLOs as change agents? These questions need answers, and our hope is that scholars will undertake this level of contemporary, critical analysis of the ongoing need for, and function of, BGLOs.

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Additionally, there are many BGLOs that are not part of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), such as Groove Phi Groove, Swing Phi Swing, Malik Sigma Psi, and Alpha Lambda Omega. Clearly, NPHC BGLOs are not the only black Greek-letter organizations that have shaped the history of blacks in this country, and someone needs to undertake a historical analysis of non-NPHC BGLOs. For example, when did they form? Why did they form? What was their mission? If their foundational aims and agendas were similar to those of NPHC BGLOs, why did their founders establish separate organizations? Have these organizations worked in collaboration with NPHC BGLOs to further the cause of racial uplift? These and many other unanswered questions are worthy research directions for scholars to pursue.

Finally, there are other ethnic minority Greek-letter organizations that cut across religious, sexual orientation, and ethnic groups—for example, Sigma Lambda Epsilon, a sorority for Latinas; Gamma Zeta Alpha, a fraternity for Latinos; Pi Delta Psi, a fraternity for Asian men; Sigma Psi Zeta, a sorority for Asian women; Lambda Sigma Gamma, a multicultural sorority; and Zeta Chi Epsilon, a multicultural fraternity. To our knowledge, no one has written a comprehensive history of multicultural Greek-letter organizations, and one is sorely needed. The questions raised earlier about non-NPHC BGLOs provide a solid direction for research on these groups as well.

In sum, we hope that this book serves as a catalyst for more research on BGLOs. In this volume, we have presented a wealth of information about these groups—their beginnings, their culture, and their contemporary struggles—that has not been published previously, especially in a way that cuts across all BGLOs. We, as well as the authors in their respective chapters, have highlighted areas that are not covered in this book but are worthy of attention. We hope to address many of these topics in future editions of this book. We hope, too, that this book will provide a clarion call to researchers and future scholars of all disciplines to undertake the study of BGLOs. Such a multidisciplinary approach will no doubt shed even brighter light on this important institution within the black community.

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